

SERVANTS OF THE GOVERNMENT

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• EDITED *by* CHAPMAN COHEN •

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*Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums,
Letters to the Editor, etc.*

Views and Opinions

Servants of the Government

SIR THOMAS INSKIP, the Attorney-General, is not a very acute controversialist, and if the best he can do is not very good, all that one can say in his defence is that it is the best of which he is capable. It can be said of him that he is an official, a member of the Government, and if when he is acting in his official capacity he is saying something which he knows to be either false, or fallacious, or wrong, his conception of intellectual ethics is just that of most prominent politicians. Neither can one dismiss from one's memory the recollection that while as President of the Lord's Day Observance Society he harangued his Society, dwelling upon the consideration that in his judgment the welfare of England depended upon the maintenance of the Sabbatarian Sunday, and that its destruction would considerably injure the British moral character, he, as Attorney-General, faithfully piloted the Cinema Bill through the House of Commons, and ignored the objections, which as President of the Lord's Day Observance Society, he had brought against it. He was thus faithful to both loves, and if the moment of loving one involved the necessity for kicking the other downstairs, well, that was an accident of the situation, and not many leading politicians could afford to call attention to his conduct. I think it was Hamlet who described politicians as men "who would outwit God." And if God is, as most of its members believe, a patron of the L.D.O.S., one wonders what excuse Sir Thomas will offer when he makes his appearance in heaven, if only *en route* for elsewhere.

* * *

Our Masters

During the debate on the Incitement to Disaffection Bill, Sir Thomas assured the House of Commons that the object of the Bill was to defend servants of the Crown against those who would seduce them from their loyalty. Let me assume that to be the case, for it is not that point I have in mind. For the moment, at least, I am ready to grant that Sir Thomas is speak-

ing according to his instructions, and like a good lawyer pleading in a criminal case, he is ready to say all that can be said on behalf of his client, even though he may smile inwardly while he is saying it. But, in any case, the apology, as put, is a very dangerous one. It rouses more doubts than it dispels.

Let us take the use of the phrase "loyalty to the Government." The Government must always mean the Government of the day. It is not the equivalent of the State which persists through changes of Governments, nor of Society which persists even though the form of the State may, as in Russia, undergo radical transformation. The Government is relatively a mere temporary collection of individuals who may owe their position to some wave of popular passion, or merely because the people are tired of one Government and resolve to try a change, on the principle that the new lot cannot be worse than the old one.

Now, in the opinion of Sir Thomas Inskip the people who for the time being are under the control of the Government are its servants. This belief is not common to Sir Thomas, it is shared by most local bodies, from the smallest village council up to the Government at Westminster. The people under their control are servants, not of the people, not of the State, but of the Council, or of the Government. They must be loyal to their employers, and if that meant that they must carry out the instructions of those who from whatever cause are placed in control of them, that also might be granted—with reservations. But the "Disaffection Bill" aims at more than this, and Sir Thomas implies more than this. His conception of "loyalty" is that the "servants" of the Government must be protected from all propaganda that may alter the opinions of these "servants" with regard to the Government. And that is a very different matter. Note further that the particular literature or propaganda against which this class of people have to be protected is such as may be distributed without hindrance among civilians that are not in the employ of the Government. The army, the navy, the air-force, the Crown, the Government may be severely criticized without anyone being subject to prosecution. Were it otherwise, there would have been no need for this particular Bill. If this be granted, then it is assumed that when a man enters the State service, whatever may have been his opinion about the Government before, he must either allow his critical faculties to lie dormant, or he must be straightway convinced that the Government can do no wrong.

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The Limits of Obedience

But I think that it can reasonably be argued that members of the civil service, and even of the army and navy, are not servants of the Government at all. They are servants of Society, of the whole body of

the people, and the Government are no more than a body of officials who are placed in temporary command. This certainly involves a carrying out of orders, but does it involve more than that? Does it mean that those directly employed by the State must in the name of loyalty, refrain from exercising their critical powers concerning the Government, or must not be approached with arguments against the Government which temporarily exists; that they must not be told that it is a bad one, and that the laws which are passed under its influence are bad ones? In other words, must they surrender when they enter the public service, that free play of intelligence, and that right to criticize which is regarded as the inalienable possession of every citizen in a free State? The ground on which it is thought advisable that every man and woman should be left to form whatever opinions he or she, cares to form is not that the opinions so formed will be sound ones, but only that in this way they are more likely to form opinions that are of value than will be the case if the opinions they hold are formed for them by either Church or State.

To permit this right to some while denying it to others, is to rob one class of their primary privileges as citizens. Or if it is said that this right is refused to "Government servants" only, or even to the army and navy and police only, then this is saying that while freedom of thought and expression is good for the civilian, in the case of the armed forces it is not good, and a different discipline must be maintained; this is equal to saying that a different and lower type of character is necessary with the "servants of the Government" than is required elsewhere. It is not I who say this, it is the Government of the day that says it in the Bill now before Parliament; it is Sir Thomas Inskip who says it in his professional defence of that Bill. For my own part I do not believe that it is essential to the efficiency of an army or a navy—so long as either are considered necessary—that the individuals comprising them shall be treated as mentally inferior to the rest of the country, and therefore cannot safely be trusted to weigh arguments that are put before them with the ability and judgment of which others are capable. And I altogether deny the wisdom of the theory that a fence must be drawn round them, that they must be prevented reading arguments for and against every question that is engaging the attention of the civilian population.

It is said that if soldiers and sailors and policemen were to be subjected to all sorts of propaganda, the Government would never be able to count on their orders being carried out with unquestioning obedience. This may be so, and I am not sure that this would be altogether a bad thing. It is not wholly bad for the Government of the day to feel that there is a point beyond which it dare not go, that it must use the instruments within its control with wisdom and with caution or they may break in their hands. All over the world to-day we are witnessing what evils may result from a governing body obtaining control of the armed forces of a country, and using them to carry out its will. To effect such an achievement it is necessary to control the press, and education, and to shut off free and open criticism. It would not be quite so easy to do this if the armed forces, including the police were permitted, even encouraged to form opinions of their own, as civilians form theirs, and with no greater limitations.

* * *

The State as a Church

There is still another very important consideration. All over the world the sphere of State action is steadily extending. I believe that this is, on the

whole, for good, and it may be noted that it is a development that has been forced upon peoples rather than sought by them. But the extension of State control lends itself only too easily to the State attempting to control in such a manner that, whenever it has been successful, it has resulted in the gravest of evils. The temptation in such cases is very great, and it becomes as natural to suppress freedom of criticism in the name of the State as it once was in the name of the Church. Criticism in such cases is not merely wrong, it is an act of treason to the State, as it once was treason to God. Those immediately under the control of the Government are treated, not as servants of the whole of Society, but as the private army of the Government to be used as opportunity dictates, and an army that is forbidden to question any of the orders that are issued. We have a perfect army of officials to-day, and the recruits grow more numerous. But if this ever-growing army is to be treated by the Government as its own, to be ringed round with Acts of Parliament against the influence of open propaganda, so that it may remain "loyal"—not be it noted—to the people as a whole, but merely to the Government, then we shall rapidly be reduced to a position somewhat analogous to a country that is being dominated by a benevolently disposed foreign army of occupation.

Apparently it is in the mind of Sir Thomas Inskip that when a man enters the "service of the Government" it becomes his first duty to do as he is told without any word of criticism, and it is in order that the servant of the Government shall not develop the reprehensible habit of doing his own thinking that the protection of an Incitement to Disaffection Bill is required. I do not agree with this position. Free-thinkers have often denounced the practice of the Christian Church, which requires a young man to support a given set of beliefs for the rest of his life. I do not see a very great difference between a Church which demands this blind obedience to orders, and a State or a Government which makes the same demands, and when they are ignored, or, in spite of all that may be done, when the individual will assert his right of criticism, denounces or punishes him as an enemy of the State. I do not know of any Government on the face of the earth that is not the better for the fullest criticism; and I do not know any Government that does not, sooner or later, lapse into tyranny, whenever this criticism is withheld. It is surely but a questionable benefit if the same spirit that dominated the Church is to be born again in the secular State.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

[The continuation of Mr. Cohen's article on "Miracles" is held over until next week.]

"Armistice Day" At The Monument

ONE day each year they gather round the spot
 Made sacred to the brave who fought, and fell:
 This stone, surmounted by a Cross, shall tell
 Of lives in vain, and promises forgot:
 "Two minutes silence!" This redeems the rot
 Of military pomp, tattoo, and shell—
 The hardy annual we know so well—
 Thus we prepare more victims for their lot!
 Aye, they who shed the warm red wine of youth,
 Fought 'neath a spell that stirred the inmost mind
 To sacrifice for peace and humankind;
 And we awake to shattered hopes, and—truth!
 Their flesh was for the ghouls; and they must sup
 The sweet red wine from out a poisoned cup!

WM J. LAMB.

A Book for the Bairns

"Liberty's chief foe is theology."—Bradlaugh.

"Clericalism, there is the enemy!"—Gambetta.

"Unless we can teach humanity, we may resign the charge of religion."—Landor.

NATIONAL education in this country has always been hampered by the desire of the clergy, of whom there are forty thousand, to associate religious teaching with the ordinary secular school programme. This selfish desire has been further complicated by the dissensions among the clergy themselves. The teachings of the Established Church are considered by the Free Churches to be wrong and harmful, whilst the instructions given by Nonconformists is pronounced by Churchmen to be heretical and dangerous. Roman Catholics and Jewish people in their turn, consider that the Church of England and Free Churches are alike so monstrous that they provide their own schools. Churchmen and Nonconformists, however, agree that the Christian Bible be read in the schools, but that no theological doctrines be taught. This astute clerical move is called "the compromise," and, although it satisfies the majority of the clergy, who use it as the thin edge of the wedge, it still impedes real education and fetters progress. For the clergy realize only too well that so long as their fetish-book is forced upon the children of this country their own very comfortable position as a clerical caste is safeguarded for yet another generation.

There are grave reasons, however, why this particular Bible should have no official place in the school programmes. Its educational value is out of date, and its teaching is out of harmony with the times in which we live. What do our kindergarten teachers, for instance, make of such Biblical advice as "a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding"; "Thou shalt beat him with a rod"; "Chasten thy son, and let not thy soul spare for his crying"? Such barbarous injunctions may receive the blessings and approbation of forty thousand paid professors of the Christian Religion, but they remain the essence of cruelty, and their application merits the attention of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, or even the Police.

This is not all of the indictment. Large portions of the Christian Bible are actually unfit for the perusal of children. If it were an ordinary volume instead of a fetish-book it would be branded as immoral, and excluded, not only from every school, but from every home in the country. For in its alleged sacred pages may be found plain, unvarnished accounts of rape, sodomy, unnatural vice, and all manner of Oriental "frightfulness," written with all the love of detail peculiar to all Eastern writers. The florid, heated rhetoric of this Bible leaves nothing to the imagination, and the least-lettered reader can appreciate its glowing periods. Eastern nastiness begins where Western pornography stops, and the ordinary sex-novel is a model of purity and restraint compared with the lusciousness of the authors of this Bible. No modern novelist would dare for a single moment to imitate such writing, for he would be imprisoned and his books destroyed. Yet the forty thousand clergy of this country force this Bible of theirs, which contains all this objectionable matter, into the hands of hundreds of thousands of children, knowing all the time that they dare not read the work in all its completeness to a mixed audience of adults.

As a school text book, the Bible is untrustworthy. Biblical chronology is nonsensical. Are children to be taught that the universe was "created" six thousand years ago, that "Adam," "Noah," and

"Methusaleh" lived near a thousand years, and that Melchisedech had neither beginning nor ending of days, and may be walking around to-day. Philology gets no countenance from the blunders of the builders of Babel, nor from the pious perversions of the tongues of flame at Pentecost. The mistakes of Moses, according to Bishop Colenso, strained the credulity of a Zulu to breaking point. Yet all this Niagara of nonsense is taught to children as a serious record of past events. In sober truth, there is neither history nor science worth troubling with in the sacred volume. The atmosphere throughout is that of the *Arabian Nights*, so beloved by pantomime producers. In the sacred pages a snake talks, a whale has a boarding-house in its stomach, a ghost acts as a co-respondent, and a donkey makes speeches. Found in another book these marvels would only excite laughter or derision.

Concerning medicine, the young reader finds the long-discredited notion of demoniacal possession given as the cause of disease. Fevers are rebuked, leprosy cured by a fig-poultice, and blindness removed by expectoration. Some divinely favoured persons die twice, and others, still more favoured, never trouble the undertakers. Witchcraft is still insisted upon as being true long after it has been discarded by every nation with the slightest pretence to civilization.

Moreover, the lives and actions of the Old Testament Patriarchs, and of the kings of Israel and Judah, and so many other Biblical heroes, are far too reminiscent of the pages of the *Newgate Calendar*. Some of the over-rated Psalms are a further proof that ancient ideas are, fortunately for us, not our ideals. Listen to the inspired language:—

The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.

And, again:—

Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones

In plain English, this sacred fetish-book, from the page describing "Adam" and "Eve" starting life at full age until the Second Person of the Undivided Trinity ascends into the ether like an aeroplane, is a salmagundi of riotous and unrestrained Eastern imagination. The book is inconsistent with ascertained knowledge, and alien to the humanistic spirit of the age, and, sooner or later, it will have to be so regarded in spite of all the priests of Christendom. For Freethinkers have set themselves the task of freeing the little children from the absurdities, immoralities, and barbarities of remote and uncivilized times perpetuated by this fetish-book.

Although compulsory national education has been in existence for over half a century, it has been largely ineffective, because our "pastors and masters" do not wish the ordinary citizen to know too much. Money is spent on costly buildings, but not on education and classes are often far too large.

The blunt truth is that the majority of our population is not even half-educated, despite two thousand years of Christian teaching and priestly supervision. It is as plain as a pikestaff that to be a Christian one need not be educated, nor intelligent. To be a Freethinker one must learn and think. The strength of Priestcraft lies in the unthinking and uninformed masses. In nine cases out of ten the Christian is a man who does not understand his own religion, who does not know what he himself believes or disbelieves, and has never given a solitary hour's study or thought to any other faith. The

Christian Religion batters upon ignorance. Its greatest strength is the tail-end of civilization. It represents the lowest culture in modern society. The Christian clergy march at the back of the procession of humanity, and pretend, hypocritically, to be in the vanguard of progress. And it is these men who so control education in this country that reverence is paid to them and their Oriental fetish-book, with the result that they live in comfort at the expense of their fellow-men. Education can never be wholly satisfactory while it is under the control of a corrupt ambitious and wealthy priesthood, whose constant desire is, not the cultural welfare of the children, but the training of young worshippers. That way spells prosperity to the black army of priests.

MIMNERMUS.

Spiritual Assistance in Savage Lands

FOR countless centuries man's belief in ghostly survival appears to have been almost universal. Dread of the departed has also been a predominant characteristic of human kind. Nevertheless, a few instances have been recorded in which fear of the family spirits is tempered with affection in the thoughts of contemporary uncivilized stocks. A few instances of scepticism concerning the soul's survival have also been met with in savage life. Usually, however, the conviction that death ends all gains ever increasing acceptance with the growth of civilization and culture, so that, at least with the mass of the educated classes in the Western World, little real faith in human immortality survives.

That primitive peoples commonly regard the ghosts of the dead with sentiments of fear and suspicion is a firmly-established truth. This verity has recently been elaborated in the brilliant lectures of our veteran anthropologist, Sir J. G. Frazer, and two volumes of these, entitled *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion*, have now been published. Those literary beauties familiar to students of the *Golden Bough*, adorn the writings, which contain a wealth of information drawn from every trustworthy source.

Ghostly aversion has assumed various forms. Praise and prayer, abasement, the cruel and bloody sacrifices of men and animals to ever-hungry divinities; the burning alive of heretics in Christian lands, are all ultimately traceable to a desire to captivate, conciliate or appease the dreaded unseen powers. Terrible, indeed, have been the torments traceable to the malign influences of this savage cult in all stages of its evolution.

When compared with the firmness of savage faith in the abode of shades, the religious conceptions even of orthodox Christians appear vague and indefinite. Savage tribes do really and truly believe in their religion. This is clearly demonstrated by the manner in which it sways their lives.

Like their living prototypes the ancestral spirits sometimes retain the milk of human kindness, even in death's dread abode. On the other hand, there are many cases in which the spirits in their disembodied state display a passion for evil-doing far exceeding anything they ever exhibited in life. Others, however, while remaining morbidly sensitive to the slightest neglect and ever-expectant of prayer and adoration, while still retaining their uncertain temper and mischievous propensities, at the same time preserve their interest in all that befalls their surviving kinsfolk in their earthly avocations.

With the Kiwai, a people of the Port Moresby district of British New Guinea; it is the custom when

performing their ceremonies, to make gifts and to drink to the good fortune of their forefathers "who are earnestly and solemnly entreated to come to their aid on any projected enterprise. There is never a garden site chosen, a garden fence built, a yam planted or any fishing expedition undertaken without these spirits being called upon to bless and prosper the enterprise." And in their military, hunting and fishing expeditions the procedure is the same.

It is deemed imperative to keep on good terms with the all-powerful spirits if social and economic affairs are to flourish. So, with the arrival of the season of turtle-fishing, there is a ceremony to promote its success. The Kiwai make the burial places spick and span, and deposit food and drink on the graves for the spirits' refreshment on the principle that one good turn deserves another. To make assurance doubly sure, they speak to the shades of the departed, saying, "Send us turtle, we give you food."

Sometimes, when the ancestral shades display indifference to the kindness shown them, and a hunting or fishing undertaking ends in failure, the natives wax indignant. A striking instance of this is manifested by the Gonds of Central India. After an excellent catch the fish are placed on a structure erected in front of the dwelling of the leader of the expedition, and the fish are later distributed among the tribe, a single fish remaining on the mound. This fish is removed on the following morning to the grave of the leader's father as a thank-offering to the dead. But when the fishing proves a failure this ceremony is neglected while, on the other hand, the women display their disgust by demolishing the mound standing near the chief fisherman's hut. "Then," writes Frazer, "early next morning all the people go to another village and there dance a certain dance before the ancestors of that village. The headman of that village then levies a contribution on his people, and gives the visitors food and drink and a present of money, with which the visitors buy liquor and, going home to their village, offer the liquor in front of the platform they had destroyed." Fishing is then resumed, but if the fishers return empty the mound or platform is again demolished, and the natives show their resentment by marching off to another village and there capering before its ancestral sprites, thus transfer their loyalty from their own forefathers to those of others. The negligent spirits who had not sent the fishes are thus snubbed down to their proper level. After a time, however, the discarded and contrite spirits are reinstated by means of a present of liquor forwarded by the headman of the adjoining village, which serves as a solace to their wounded pride. Thus, having been taught a much needed lesson, it is hoped that the spirits will pay more attention to the wants of their children.

Many other examples of the foregoing savage observances might be given, in which the main motive is, the gaining of the good will of the departed for the benefit of the surviving community. The graves are swept and garnished; palm-wine and other exhilarating beverages are poured upon them, and when a hunting, food-collecting or fishing expedition is crowned with success the spirits are considered as having fulfilled their duty to their descendants.

The Eskimo, whose habitat is on the bleak strands of Behring Strait, suppose that the souls of infants who have died at the time of their delivery from the maternal womb, on that account exercise great influence over the game animals, and this they transfer to the hunter. Indeed, so invaluable are the powers of an infant's spirit that in order to obtain one, a native will murder a child. The killing, however, must be conducted in strict secrecy, and the slayer must

secure possession of the corpse in so natural a manner that no one suspects foul play. The dead body is dried, placed in a bag, and carried on the person, or placed in his boat when the fisherman sets forth to sea. Again, if "a hunter carries one of these ghastly relics, it is believed that the ghost of the child, which is very sharp-sighted, will assist him in finding game, and direct his spear in its flight so that he shall not miss his mark."

At seasons of sowing, and at the ingathering of the harvest the local spirits are invited to share in the labour. When the souls of the dead are responsive they are regaled with festivals and feasts which are believed to bestow pleasure and provide sustenance. Before planting their taro patches the Yabim of New Guinea request the spirits to keep within the forests, and also protect the growing crops and make the harvest bountiful. To induce the dead to lend a willing ear to their entreaties, the people promise the spirits presents of boar's tusks and other ornaments with which to bedeck themselves in the land of shades. Meanwhile, their material needs are not forgotten, and offerings of porridge and fermented liquors are made. Sometimes the spirits are supplicated to act as guardians against the depredations of higher animal and insect foes of the crops, while in New Celebes the Toradyas are firmly convinced that a bountiful harvest depends entirely on the attitude of the ancestral spirits with whom it is imperative to maintain good relations.

Among many of the Naga tribes of India the ghosts of the dead preside over the growth and ripening of the harvest, and are apparently presumed to be present in an invisible form in the crops themselves. Another North-eastern Indian people, the Lakhers, think the presence of the ancestral sprites absolutely indispensable to a bountiful ingathering of the season's crops. In October a sacrifice is prepared to promote the fertility of the soil; to secure the health and abundance of the domesticated animals; and also to ensure a successful hunting period. This sacrifice is supposed to provide pleasure to the spirits and maize and rice are placed before them to induce them to remain in the village. So as to afford every facility for their journey, a broad road leading to the village is constructed, and then the people parade the road, sounding gongs and beating drums to greet the invisible visitors and conduct them to the dwelling where the offerings are to be presented. Then, at least one of the tribes place provisions on the graves of the recently dead for their spiritual repast.

Customs and ceremonies of this character prevail in all parts of the world, and survive in attenuated form among the European peasantry. In Christian communities the crops are still blessed, and the Alpine heights are implored by priests to wreak no injury on the people, while the sacrifice of the mass was recently celebrated on glacier-dams to prevent their bursting, and thus destroying the homes, lives and property of the valley population below.

Purely natural causation is a firmly established philosophical truth, despite the vagaries of a few fashionable reactionaries who, to a limited extent, bewilder the public mind. Wise are the words of the late Professor Tyndall in this connexion when he assures us that science asserts, "that without a disturbance of natural law, quite as serious as the stoppage of an eclipse, or the rolling of the St. Lawrence up the Falls of Niagara, no act of humiliation, individual or national, could call one shower from heaven, or deflect towards us a single beam of the sun."

T. F. PALMER.

Life and its Mechanisms

FROM time to time questionable expressions seem to push their way into fashion, some of them, like "womanly intuition"—the novelists' bread and butter—becoming long-established. But as the boulders of ignorance are disintegrated by the waves of truth, so do words like "instinct," "life," "adaptation," become broken up into their constituent factors and conditions. It looks as if "instinct" will be bequeathed to literature, as "soul" is left as the birthright of poets.

A peculiar expression now current is "the new science," which really carries its own condemnation. Science is still science, no matter how wide its arms are flung. It remains the same ever-growing system of knowledge, whether explored by Tyndall and Clifford in the nineteenth century or by Keith and Hogben in the twentieth. It is the nature of science to develop and to embrace new departments, and we can no more accurately speak of the "new" science than of the new education or new music.

What we can speak of are the new *findings*, or the new *departments*, of science. Such, e.g., is Biochemistry. Biochemistry is the science of the chemistry of life-processes. It explains, in deterministic terms, organic activity formerly attributed to a "vital principle."

The story of the abandonment of vitalist, in favour of mechanist, interpretations would, let it again be repeated, fill many pages. In 1909 the German Prof. Reinke said in his (untranslated) *Groundwork of Biology*, "It would be a waste of time for a chemist to try to change carbonic acid into sugar in the laboratory in the same way as the reaction goes on by itself in the plant." Shortly afterwards biochemistry had taken the first step towards it in Prof. B. Moore's production of formaldehyde by exposing a tube of water and carbonic acid to the action of the light from a mercury-vapour lamp. Subsequently, Baly transformed the formaldehyde into sugar by exposure to light, and to-day it is produced artificially. Numbers of such instances appear in Moore's *Biochemistry* (1921). The artificial production of organic substances holds out the hope of making protoplasmic varieties.

A distinguished physiologist in 1895, Sir Michael Foster, deemed it impossible to trace oxygen any further, once it had entered the muscles from the blood; "the whole mystery of life," he said, "lies hidden in this process." The mystery vanishes with the work of A. V. Hill and Meyerhof on muscle mechanics (see Hogben's *Nature of Living Matter*) so that Sir F. G. Hopkins has said, more recently, that every step in muscle contraction has been chemically explained.

Hopkins was President of the British Association for the 1933 meeting, and he then exploded one or two more Vitalist myths. When the mechanistic explanation of the metabolism, or intake and output of matter by cells, had begun, vitalism was thrown back on the division and differentiation of cells, which was never to yield to physical or chemical treatment. Already, said Hopkins, research gives evidence of an at present obscure chemical.

He referred, also, to the discovery of the chemicals which determine what stuff each particular type of cell shall select from the blood stream, and into what form it shall be built. A few years ago Vitalists like the late J. A. Thomson were emphasizing these vital processes, which chemistry, they contended could never explain.

Yet another instance is taken from Prof. Osterhout's *Nature of Life* (1924). A delicate glass fila-

ment coated with sealing wax, was brought into contact with a drop of chloroform. The investigator (Prof. Jennings) found that, like the living amoeba, the drop of chloroform absorbed the object, "digested" the wax, and left the indigestible glass. The inference? That "we need not despair of finding mechanical explanations" applicable to the more complex functioning in the human body (Osterhout). The Vitalist must prepare to quit his last hold on biology. His "explanations" must go to join Johannes Müller's "imponderable psychical principle (1845)"¹ and the chemist Henry's directing principle" (1827).²

Thirty years ago Haeckel, recommending Pflüger's hypothesis, suggested the "carbon theory" of life. To-day we have Prof. Beutner telling us that "Life, in spite of its complexity, seems to be no more than one of the innumerable properties of the compounds of carbon." (*The Physical Chemistry of Living Tissues and Life Processes*, 1933.)

Much vital activity can be explained as the action of hormones and enzymes. The former are produced by the ductless glands, and four types of hormones are among those organic substances which can now be made in the laboratory.

"The physiologist is still at work finding more and more activity of enzymes in our vital operations from digestion upwards, and the organic chemist is endeavouring to understand their nature" (McCabe). Each type has a special function; they make possible, and adapt, the absorption of nourishment into the cell.

Hormones and enzymes are substances, but a third discovery, tropisms, are a concept. A tropism is a form of physico-chemical sensitiveness to the influence of gravity and of light. At present their effect is studied in plant and animal life, beginning with the simple fact that the roots from a seed strike downwards and the leaf-stems upwards to the light. In the human head there are balancing, or gravity, organs, (statocysts), which facilitate the automatic maintenance or recovery of upright posture. In the shrimp the "stones" of these organs have been removed and replaced by iron filings, and the experimenter finds that then, if he holds a strong magnet above it, the animal swims upside down. Insect life is now largely explained by these tropisms: e.g., the moth and the light (which in Lubbock's day was thought to indicate some fascination for the light!) Models can now be made which imitate the moth's behaviour. Two photo-electric cells are substitutes for the eyes, and each works an electric engine on its side. When the light falls on one "eye" the model circles round like a paddle-boat with one engine going. Black one eye of a moth, and it will fly in a circle. But when the light hits both "eyes," the electric current passes to both motor machines, and the model goes straight ahead into the light, just as the live moth does.

Instead of "instincts," we shall soon be speaking of hormones, enzymes, tropisms and automatic nerve activity.

Turning to the problem of heredity, the principles of Mendelism are usually accepted, and the theory is thoroughly mechanistic. Instead of an immaterial guiding force directing the molecules of the mother's blood to their places in the embryo, we are beginning to understand, on deterministic lines, how the ultra-microscopic particles, the "genes," build up eyes,

ears, etc., like those of the ancestors. Thousands of these "genes" are passed by each parent into the ovum, and Mendelism³ studies and formulates the laws of their behaviour. And the progress of experimental embryology under Jacques Loeb and others has proceeded along totally mechanistic lines.

From the known facts an inference is that life has evolved from inanimate matter. The late Prof. B. Moore, in 1913, contended for the inevitability of chemical evolution of life (*The Origin and Nature of Life*); and other authorities (Sir E. Sharpey-Schafer, Sir P. C. Mitchell, Dr. E. J. Allen, etc.) consider that life may be evolving out of matter to-day. Prof. Beutner and others believe the evolution of life to have begun with the formation of enzymes. Whatever the mode of origin, the natural evolution of life from non-life is given as settled teaching in a work like the symposium, *The Evolution of the Earth and its Inhabitants*, by Prof. R. S. Lull and other experts.

* * *

Mystic Vitalism, that of Bergson or Joad, is left without a prophet among those qualified to speak. Its place is taken by Neo-Vitalism and by the "organismal" theory (Holism). The former is advocated by a physicist, Sir Oliver Lodge. In this theory determinism is accepted, and the "life force" works, not by interaction, but by first laying down the path along which life is to proceed deterministically. Life, as it were, is the railway-line along which the train of evolution is to proceed. There is no inoculation, and life gives, not energy, but guidance, with the laws of science unbroken. The mechanistic process is only answering, automatically, the pre-conceived plan. "Form-waves," says Lodge, are "the physical mechanism whereby life operates on and directs material particles." There are about four forms of Holism, but they have in common a unifying and regulating principle, whose effect is whole-making. As a conscious agent it must take its place with directive agency, entelechy, élan vital, archæus, vital force and soul.

However, it is not here my intention to discuss the theory of purpose. One of the highest American authorities, the mechanist, Dr. E. B. Wilson, says, "Shall we then join hands with the Neo-Vitalists? . . . Yes, if we are ready to abandon the problem. No, a thousand times, if we hope to advance our understanding. . . . I do not believe that a confession of ignorance leaves us with no resource save Vitalism." Such "would be to lapse into the dark ages." (*Physical Basis of Life*).

Science refuses to lapse into the dark ages. Year by year it fills in the gaps in a mechanistic account of existence, the main tenet of a materialistic philosophy.

G. H. TAYLOR.

³ Mendelism "supplies the missing parts of the structure first created by Darwin," and has outgrown its own original fallacies. (Dr. Fisher, *The General Theory of Natural Selection*, 1930.)

THE REIGN OF TERROR DEISTIC

During the Reign of Terror the French were declared to be a nation of Atheists. Robespierre then proclaimed in the Convention that belief in the existence of a God was necessary to those principles of virtue and morality upon which the Republic was founded; and on May 7 the national representatives, who had so lately prostrated themselves before the Goddess of Reason, voted by acclamation that "the French people acknowledge the existence of the Supreme Being, and the immortality of the soul."—*Smith's History of France*.

¹ In this case, the nervous impulse. Six years after Müller's profession of ignorance, Helmholtz measured its velocity, the possibility of which Müller denied.

² Operative in organic compounds; with the reduction of organic chemistry to that of the carbon compounds Henry's position becomes obsolete.

Acid Drops

It is difficult to form any coherent idea of what the religious question means to most Germans. Those who look upon Hitler as their Saviour are, of course, ready to believe anything he says, but it is absurd to believe that he has the whole of Germany with him. There must be some sanity in its vast population. But Christians here are very concerned with the fact that the unspeakable Rosenberg wants the people to have a German God—say Odin—rather than Jesus. But why not? Why shouldn't Odin "save" quite as much as Jesus? And, anyway, which deity has presided over more cruelty. Odin or Jesus? The history of Christianity is stained by a nightmare of bloodshed, and nothing done in the name of Odin could be any worse. But what a joke—Odin or Jesus? And this in 1934!

But, when all this has been said, why should Germany not have a German God? We have a British God, the Americans have an American God, and within the nation each has a God answering to the ideas and ideals of special groups. Every nation makes a God in its own image, and cannot help doing so. Look at the Christian God of the time of St. Paul, who ruled like an oriental autocrat, or treated man as a potter does his pots, making one to honour and another to dishonour. Then compare him with the God of the Christian Socialist of today, who desires only the social salvation of the people on earth, and who is keenly interested in bringing about the collective ownership of all the means of production and distribution. Look at the differences in the God of Bishop Barnes and of the head of the Salvation Army? Man has always made God in his own image, and he cannot get a God in any other way. Hitler is not acting on any new plan, or adopting any new principle. He is only making—because of his unintellectual character, the process of god-making clear to everyone.

There was a Conference of Headmasters at Harpenden, the other day, and one of the speakers, in discussing religious education said that, "It was generally agreed that the Old Testament could safely be dealt with in the light of the higher criticism, but the New Testament should receive different treatment." We fancy the governing word in that sentence is "safely." It means that while a deal of the truth about the Old Testament has to be admitted, it would not be "safe" to let out the truth concerning the New Testament. Of course, so long as the old lies will serve one need not expect to get the truth. That is what Christians understand by "advanced" religious belief.

Miss H. V. Stuart, a Harpenden schoolmistress, at the Conference of Headmasters and Headmistresses, urged the formation of a Federation of Youth Societies. Why? To further the interests of Youth? Not a bit of it. She is a Christian, and she wished to exploit the work of the Youth groups "in the interests of religion, because Christianity is a much greater force than Communism or Nazism." It is certainly quite as impudent as any known "force."

In the life of himself that Mr. H. G. Wells is writing for the *Daily Herald*, he frankly and fully expresses his regret for using the word "God," which he says resulted only in misleading people. We welcome the admission, and it is what we have so very frequently insisted on both as regards the word "God" and also "religion." There is more moral cowardice and intellectual turpitude covered by the use of these expressions than is indicated by any other two words in the English language. There is no reason why they should be used by anyone who is outside the Churches, and who has thrown over the belief in a genuine God and a genuine religion, save that he wishes to stand well with people whose opinions are hardly worth bothering about. Mr. Wells now, we understand, prefers to call himself "a sturdy Atheist."

The Bishop of Rochester says:—

I think it possible and justifiable for a man who holds the doctrine of the incarnation and the resurrection to repeat the words of the creed, though he may not be convinced of the evidence of the historical narratives of the New Testament as sufficient to prove that the events occurred as they are described.

In plain English, a man may believe these stories to be "all my eye and Betty Martin," but if he says that he believes them to be true, that is enough to make him a Christian. It was a little schoolgirl who defined faith as consisting in believing to be true what you knew was a lie.

The British and Foreign Bible Society admits that things are not very bright with it in China, but boasts of having distributed four million copies of parts of the Bible in China. They omit to tell the public to what kind of use "God's holy word" was put by the Chinese, and as most probably, all these were given away, the feat does not appear to be such a great one. Like many commercial firms the B. & F.B.S. hopes to make good in the foreign markets what it loses here, but we cannot imagine the dwellers in the land of Confucius taking a rabid delight in the wars of the Jews, or in Jehovah's massacres. The Society spills the usual gush about there being a rich "spiritual harvest" coming, but what the Society is after is a rich harvest of subscriptions at home; and unless the tale is properly told this is not likely to be forthcoming.

Dr. Schweitzer is "surprised that Jesus spoke so little" about the "doctrines" in which Dr. Schweitzer is interested. On the other hand, we can understand the "surprise" of any sensible "God" at finding so many people "interested" in some very useless, absurd, and incomprehensible doctrines in which hundreds of religious believers are "interested." For instance, Dr. Schweitzer is "interested" in "Advent," and "that wonderful passage in the Apocalypse: 'Behold I stand at the door and knock'!"

Professor G. S. Duncan, D.D., in his Introduction to a new translation of Galatians, discusses the meaning of the word "righteousness." He proves quite satisfactorily that the word as used in the Bible has nothing to do with human relations with humankind. "In ordinary thinking," he truly says, "we tend to connect the word with right dealing between man and man. In revealed religion, however, righteousness is a relationship, not between man and man, but between man and God."

At the Streatham Methodist Church a service was held on behalf of an admirable charity, a society which Christian nations need in order to protect their children from some very Christian brutality. You see, there is a Commandment telling children to "honour" their parents, but no sort of advice to parents to abstain from cruelty to children. At the church referred to, the pastor wasted all his time attacking the inferior morals of Darwin, Spencer, Matthew Arnold and Huxley. His only allusion to the "Society" was in his prayer, when he asked God to "bless the Streatham Branch of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children." Imagine the Almighty's consternation at having to buy a local map, and so avoid "helping" the Tooting or other unprayed-for Society.

We are pleased to note that one cinema theatre, at least, has the courage to face the Catholic cry of "clean films" with sturdy independence. The Regal Palace, in East Ham, has put out this notice for its patrons:—

We beg our patrons not to be misled by the "dope" being issued in respect of the so-called clean up of the films. There is a vast difference between the censorship methods of this country and America. We want to make it quite clear our policy has always been to respect the intelligence of our audience—an adult audience—and we are not going to reduce our entertainment to child mentality.

If only other cinema proprietors will act in the same way, the impudence of priestly interference on a question with which they have no more to do than any ordinary layman, would be scotched. A censorship exists here in England, and most theatres abide by its decisions. Let this Church have its way here, and where will its interference end?

Besides, the question goes far beyond the cinema. These people want to censor almost everything—books, plays, pictures, amusements, in fact, bring us back to the Golden Age, when the Roman Catholic Church was supreme, and the stake, the rack and the prison ready for all who differed from its decrees. The views of a priest or a bishop or a cardinal, or even a pope are worth no more than the views of a layman, generally speaking, and a priest-ridden country can rapidly become a hell—as history testifies. We might add as one illustration, that there exists a Catholic Federation which has asked our Education Authorities to allow it to edit all history books used in schools. It wants to rectify the “errors” regarding Catholicism, and put the statements on Protestantism right from its point of view; and we are by no means sure that one day this will not be done. It only needs a Roman Catholic Minister of Education and the apathy of people opposed to him. Most censorship is bad, but a Roman Catholic Censorship means the end of all freedom.

A pretty little discussion is taking place between Mr. St. John Irvine, the well-known playwright and critic, and the *Church Times*. It is on the question as to whether marriage is, or is not, a sacrament. If it is, the paper declares, then marriage should be indissoluble—“and to the Nonconformist it is certainly not a sacrament.” Nor is it, declares Mr. Irvine in reply, to the Anglican; and he advises the editor to read the Twenty-Fifth Article of Religion, wherein it distinctly declares that Matrimony must not be counted for a sacrament of the Gospel. The editor wittily replies, “nobody ever thought it was, since the institution is not recorded in the Gospels, but in Genesis.” So now we know that while marriage is, after all, not a sacrament of the Gospels, it is a Sacrament of Genesis, and therefore still is a Sacrament. Yes, but the editor forgot that divorce is allowed in the Old Testament, so is polygamy; and if Mr. Irvine has also forgotten this, we gladly present him with another argument.

Canon Long declared, the other day, that “unless many more clergy were willing to remain unmarried, either temporarily or permanently, the work of the kingdom of God would be seriously hampered at home and abroad”; and he added that “Our Lord recommended the celibate life for those who could receive it and himself set the supreme example.” The union of celibacy to priesthood is now, as it always has been, considered a cardinal point in religion; and it is not surprising to find its insistence more and more stressed by Anglicans, thus following once again the lead given by Roman Catholics. There are few things, however, in religion, which have left such a terrible trail of suffering as sacerdotal celibacy—as Lea’s famous work on the subject has so thoroughly shown; and one can only marvel that the lessons its history throughout the ages has laid bare, have not yet been taken to heart. There is not such a wide gulf between the modern priest and the old Church Fathers on the “uncleanness of marriage” as some people think. More’s the pity.

The Rev. J. H. Hutton is very frank in acceptance of Christ’s war-like declaration. He admits that “Christ takes the veil for ever from the true nature of our vocation as Christians”—and what is this TRUE vocation? It is none other than the text, “Think not I came to send peace on earth. I came not to bring peace but a sword.” We are so seldom in harmony with Dr. Hutton that we hasten to express our complete agreement with him on this occasion.

The *British Weekly* is nothing if it is not “refained.” It will not show its ignorance by ignoring a famous phrase—and by a titled poet too. It prefers to misquote, instead, “improving” the phrase out of all robustness, and recognition. Tennyson once wrote a very biting piece of invective, one line of which was “Procuress to the Lords of Hell.” To avoid sullyng its spotless columns with so striking a phrase, the *British Weekly* refers to “the purveyors whom Lord Tennyson had the recklessness to describe dreadfully as ‘the procurers of Hell.’” Has bathos ever been so banal?

A writer in the *British Weekly* has some queer ideas about Peace. Mr. H. M. Greenwood considers that “the responsibility for war is secondary to that of righteousness.” His meaning is clearer than his phraseology. Clearly he is in favour of war. But it must only be a war of whose motive Mr. Greenwood approves. There are very many similar lovers of peace. When the Duel was abolished in England, it was not because men fought for unrighteous causes, but because fighting came to be considered an improper method of settling disagreements.

The General Convention of the American Episcopal Church was opened last month at Atlantic City, and attended by 120 bishops, 600 lay and clerical delegates, and 26,000 other people. After the oldest Bishop present gave God’s blessing to the throng, the congregation were invited to help to wipe out the deficit of £200,000, which the American Church has to face. All that could be got, however, were £51,000 in all, and this took six months hard work to gather in. Indeed the question of money seems to have overshadowed everything else—as it does, even in purely material concerns. In spite of the freedom American women enjoy, they seem to have as much difficulty in obtaining equality in the Church there as ever. While they can sit on the National Council, they actually cannot become members of the Convention. How can this be reconciled with the famous Christian saying that “in Christ all are one?”

Fifty Years Ago

IF Christians really believed the words of Jesus that “every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father or mother, or wife, or children or lands for my name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold,” they might think themselves on the safe side. But only fools or worse would forsake one’s father or mother or wife for the sake of a hundredfold in kingdom-come.

Many eminent Christians advocate this doctrine of expediency; for instance, Paley, who united the craft of a barrister with the conscience of a bishop, defines virtue as “doing good in obedience to the will of God and for the sake of everlasting happiness.” According to this, it is impossible to be virtuous unless we take the will of God as our rule and everlasting happiness as our motive. The benevolence, fortitude and humanity of a Buddhist or a Secularist is simply vice in disguise. Who would not rather say with Carlyle (“Past and Present,” bk. iii., ch. 15): “Thy future fate, while thou makest it the chief question, seems to me extremely questionable”? If we find a man who needs the fear of being burned in hell-fire or the hope of eternal bliss in heaven to keep him in the honest path, we had better look after our pockets. Of any such hope or fear one may say, as Bacon said of the fear of death, that there is no motive which is not able to overcome it. To make virtue consist in obedience to an irresponsible person for the exclusive benefit of one’s own personality, is to destroy it. To inculcate, as the motive for virtue, fancies which make this present life seem paltry, and which pamper a morbid appetite for the inscrutable, is to weaken the stimulus to that earthly exertion which alone gives worth to life.

The “Freethinker,” November 9, 1884.

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE.

EDITORIAL:

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

S. STALLIEU.—Thanks for addresses, paper being sent for four weeks.

A. COPLAND.—When a Catholic trusts to the authority of the Pope he has employed his reason to the point of reaching a judgment on that matter. Then having established what is to him a first principle, he applies it as the other first principles are applied. You cannot deny the Catholic the use of reason, your fault is with his logic. But every judgment, no matter how ridiculous, or how illogical implies an act of reason. That is a simple statement of fact. You appear to be confusing reason, as such, and logical reasoning. The two things are often quite distinct.

J. W. TURNER.—Pleased to learn that you derive so much satisfaction from the *Freethinker*.

A. SYKES.—We know nothing whatever about a Mr. Vincent McNab, save that we have heard of someone of that name who frequented Hyde Park. We don't know what is meant by Mr. Cohen having run away from Mr. McNab, unless it means that he has not consented to meet him in discussion, and even of that Mr. Cohen has no recollection. We cannot deal with the Josephus passage in a sentence; nearly all authorities of real weight have given it up as either a sheer interpolation or a great distortion of the original.

H. PUZEY.—The story of the parson who was refused admission to a sick man because if the man saw him he would think that death was near is a good, but an old, one. The Johannesburg parson, in making it his own, was acting in the usual pulpit manner.

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 1357.

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 Bural Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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

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

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

Sugar Plums

Mr. Cohen will lecture in London to-day (November 11). The lecture will be given in the King Edward Hall, Regent's Park Road, Church End, Finchley, which may be reached from various points. From Golders Green Station a No. 2 Bus to Hendon Lane, Church End, or any tram to North Finchley or Tally Ho Corner. From London Bridge a 143 Bus to Church End, Finchley. There are L.N.E.R. connexions at King's Cross, and Finsbury Park Stations for Church End, Finchley Station. It will be Mr. Cohen's first appearance on a London platform this season, and is part of an effort to widen the area of Freethought activity in London. The subject will be "Things Christians Ought to Know." The meeting commences at 7 p.m., and admission is free.

Mr. Cohen had a busy but interesting time on Tyne-side last week-end—three lectures; then a night journey to London to attend to the paper. At Sunder-

land and Newcastle the halls were filled, and no speaker could have wished for a more attentive or more appreciative audiences. In some respects the meetings formed an occasion for a reunion between Mr. Cohen and his many old friends in Durham and Northumberland. It was good to meet so many of them again, but their presence also reminded one of the many who have passed away. The penalty that one pays for living on is to see old friends drop off one after another, until one is left almost alone. Many new friends are made, and it is pleasant to note with what enthusiasm a number of the younger generation are taking up Freethought. But these are additions to one's circles, not substitutes for those who are now but a memory.

Mr. Brighton and Mr. Allan Flanders officiated as chairmen of the meetings, and both are doing good work in Durham and Northumberland. The two counties offer a splendid field for work. There is room for quite a dozen Branches of the Society in the district, although everywhere the industrial situation is very bad indeed. Yet we heard nothing but praise of what is being done, and we have hopes for a continuation of the useful propaganda that is now being carried on.

The *Rationalist Annual* for 1935 contains a number of articles, the most interesting of which are, one by Sir G. Elliott Smith, on the Aryan racial myth, and one by Professor J. B. S. Haldane, who manages to clear away a great deal of confusion concerning the present position of Darwinism. Sir Alexander Cardew writes on the Virgin Birth, keeping strictly to the very orthodox line of the New Testament story. Mr. Ernest Thurtle turns himself into a kind of devil's advocate on behalf of those who by inclination or force of circumstances are driven to compromise in the expression of their opinion, and Mr. Joad deals with the new challenge to reason, a subject that to-day needs constant attention.

An article by Professor Laski on "The Next Phase of Rationalism," calls for a more extended notice. He writes that:—

The work of the scholars and Freethinkers of the past has certainly not been in vain; but the whole fabric of our civilized life shows that they have rather destroyed the minor outworks of religious defence than penetrated to the central citadel itself.

And he argues that the propaganda of the future should be "directed towards a study of the interests religion have served in the past, the interests they serve at the present time." We need, he says, a study of "the Churches as the owners of the property; the attitude of the Churches to the great movements of political and economic emancipation; the attitude of the Churches to war—it is the implications of these things that we need bring home to the common man."

We have not the slightest idea of saying that this work is not important, but if Professor Laski has in view, to any extent, the Freethought movement which is represented by the National Secular Society, and also the Freethought movement from the time of Paine and Robert Owen, and suggests that this line has not been followed, then he shows a startling lack of acquaintance with the history of the Freethought movement during the times of Paine, Owen, Carlile, Hetherington, Holyoake, Bradlaugh, and Foote, until to-day. For this aspect has never been absent and has always been emphasized. We have ourselves been stressing it for the past forty-five years on the platform, and for the past thirty-seven years in this paper. It has, moreover, been quite common on the platform of the N.S.S. It has, indeed, been very largely this that has accounted for the hostility and the fear evinced by the "respectable" classes against it. We should not only agree with Professor Laski in saying that this is a very important work, but we should say also that this is the work that has greatly impressed the "common man," and the only

kind of Freethought that can seriously be counted with. All other phases have only gleaned where real Freethought has sown the harvest.

Nor do we think that Professor Laski is either correct or just to the "great Freethinkers and scholars," when he says that their work has "rather destroyed the minor outworks of the religious defence than penetrated to the central citadel itself." The work of the great scholars and Freethinkers has shown in what way the idea of God began, how it developed, and how other religious beliefs have come into existence, and by what means they have been perpetuated. If this is not demolishing the "central citadel itself," what is? Whatever interests religion may serve, and like other established beliefs and teachings it has always served the dominant interests, one is certainly attacking the "central citadel" when one has shown them to be based on ignorance, delusion and misinterpretation. If Professor Laski had read the *Freethinker*, and no one can pretend to a knowledge of Freethought as presented to both the common and the uncommon man without doing so, he would make us blush reminding us of the many thousands of times, in both set articles, and in paragraphs, we have pointed out that to-day there is in the light of the work of the great scholars and Freethinkers, no room for discussing whether the idea of God and a soul is even probably true. We know there is not. The only question to be discussed is the precise way in which these mistaken ideas came into existence, and the conditions that have favoured their perpetuation. But to have put forward in the name of "Rationalism" the need for doing what Freethought has never failed to do, would be very startling if it were not very amusing.

The B.B.C. has been at it again. On November 1, Professor J. B. S. Haldane was announced to speak on "Causes of War." It appears, so says the *Daily Express*—a representative of which paper interviewed the Professor—that when the Professor obediently submitted his paper to the B.B.C., that august and highly intellectual committee of experts decided that it was not fit for the ear of the British public. Well, we have no sympathy whatever with Professor Haldane; he is, in fact, not playing the game. When a man has so little self-respect as to submit to the decision of a censorship Committee, we should humbly and contentedly abide by the result. When public men fail to stand upright, but cooperate in the administration of a censorship, they must expect whatever happens. It is not for them to cry out against the suppression of free speech. They are by their action helping the suppression.

Some time ago we advised all public men who valued their self-respect higher than the fees or the publicity which the B.B.C. could give them, to make an effective protest by declining to speak so long as the censorship existed. We are glad to see that Mr. H. G. Wells is the first one to act on the lines of the advice given. He has, by way of protest, cancelled his promise to take part in a series of Broadcasts. Now we shall wait to see how many will follow his example. If some do and some do not, the public will be able to distinguish between the sheep and the goats, that is, between those who submit their manuscripts to the nonentities of the B.B.C., and those who are convinced that if they are fit to speak on a subject, they alone must decide what they will say.

Both the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Herald* write strongly in support of the attitude of H. G. Wells, and we are glad to see that our lead is being followed, even after so long a time. Up to now all we have been able to get from some of the B.B.C. speakers are apologies that they had to get their message "over." That was, of course, a mere excuse for compromise or cowardice. Men of principle do not sacrifice their principles because of a little publicity. But now that one or two have come forward and made the only kind of effective protest against censorship they could make, we shall expect others to come forward with belated heroics as pioneers

of liberty. Up to the present a great many of those who have been very loud in their protests against a censorship in Russia or Germany, or in Russia and Germany, have been supporting a censorship in this country because the censorship utilized *their* services.

Two well known N.S.S. speakers will lecture in the Phoenix Theatre, Market Street, Burnley, to-day (November 11), on behalf of the East Lancashire Rationalist Association. At 2.45 p.m., Mr. J. T. Brighton will speak on "Civilized Savagery." And at 7 p.m., Dr. C. H. Ross Carmichael will give a lantern lecture on "Body and Soul." Admission is free on both occasions, with a silver collection. The programme is a good one, and local saints should see that there is a full attendance at both meetings.

Mr. A. D. McLaren will speak in the Bristol Street Schools to-day (November 11) at 7 p.m., on "The Consecrated Lie." Mr. McLaren has many friends in Birmingham, his matter is always good, and his genial manner makes his visit an excellent opportunity for introducing orthodox friends to a baptism of Freethought.

War and the Christian Churches is a useful penny 8-page pamphlet issued by the International Publishing Co., 2 Malden Crescent, N.W.1. It consists of some telling quotations, with brief comments, from representative Christian leaders on the subject of war, and should act as a counterblast to the present talk of the clergy about peace.

The Secular Society Limited is issuing through the Pioneer Press, a book which should be of great service to the Freethought Cause. It is by Mr. George Bedborough, and is entitled *Arms and the Clergy, 1914-1918*. The work extends to over 100 pages, and is a collection, with comments and introduction, of utterances during the war years of the leading ministers of all denominations. It provides a veritable arsenal of facts for all sorts of people, and each citation is fully documented. The book will be published at one shilling in paper covers, and 2/- cloth gilt.

The *Daily Telegraph* gives prominence to a letter from Mr. S. Martin, who asks whether some effective protest cannot be made against the use of such a word as "marvellous," in both conversations and writing. He describes it as, in common with other catchwords, as showing conversational and mental laziness. But we might also add another word, which the *Daily Telegraph*, in common with the rest of the newspapers, have got into the habit of using regularly. This is the word "revealed." Once upon a time, if the announcement was of such world-wide importance as the journey of the Princess Marina leaving Paris for London, the papers would have said simply that the Princes would leave, or it is announced that she will leave, or we *learn* that she will leave. Nowadays the phrase is "It is revealed." When Captain the Hon. Mountsnooken is engaged to Miss Marbellfront, the news of that also is "revealed." Everything is now "revealed," it is never reported, or stated, or learned.

There is, we suspect, a great deal of psychology about the use of this phrase. The shallower the paper the greater the circulation, and to say that a thing is revealed instead of learned, gives the impression that, first, something of tremendous importance is being imparted, and, second, that it is owing to the tremendous power and keenness of the press that this important piece of information is being "revealed" to the world. There is nothing like a touch of the mysterious to impose on ignorance, and all the papers know it. We hope *this* "revelation" will do good where it is most needed.

It is a small thing, too, in appearance, that we should have a few more thoughts in our heads, a new feeling in our hearts, and yet it is just that which slowly leads us where we hope to win.—*Maurice Maeterlinck*.

The Failure of Religion

(Continued from page 694)

TURNING now to the particular religion called Christianity, we are able to say, probably without fear of contradiction, that it claimed, in its early stages, to perform two functions: one, that of telling us what we need to know, and the other, that of telling us what we ought to do. It would be wearisome, particularly since the Freethinker so frequently dwells upon the historical misdeeds and mistakes of Christianity, to traverse this ground again. Suffice it to say that the Bible, as an inspired compendium of all that we need to know for the purposes of this life, is relegated, even within the Church itself, to the shelves of the museum. The sphere of knowledge has been taken over by science, and few will deny the advantages resulting from the change of ownership. It is true that knowledge, particularly modern scientific knowledge, has been grievously abused; but that is a fault to which knowledge must always be open. To abolish good things would be a poor corrective for the turning of them to bad account. The proper remedy lies in their right use.

As to the second function performed by religion in the past, that of telling us what we ought to do, the position is not nearly so settled. Here we are in a region of morality, and in that sphere the Church vigorously asserts her claims. It will therefore be necessary to deal more extensively with the attitude adopted by intelligent Atheism towards this subject.

The first point to be made clear is that morality is not outside the sphere of science. In spite of the pronouncements of such as Professor Eddington to the effect that science is limited to exact processes of measurement, those who understand the true nature and function of science are able to say that its proper sphere is the entire realm of experience. All that science does is to arrange and classify experience with a view to discovering laws which correctly describe the course of events, and wherever this is methodically done we have a science in the full sense of the word. Professor Eddington is a worker in what we call the exact sciences, and that may account for his limited view, but it should have occurred to him that the very term "exact science" implies the existence of sciences that are not exact. Of these many may be mentioned, most of them of recent origin. Psychology, Ethnology, Sociology, Anthropology are well recognized and established sciences, all proceeding along lines not substantially different from the exact sciences of physics, mathematics, etc. In the case of all we have no more than observation and experiment, classification and induction, and the final drawing up of the widest generalizations in the form of laws. With what degree of precision these laws describe the processes of which they treat is a matter not vital to the nature of science as such. That is to say, science is not less scientific when it becomes less precise, for the essence of science lies not in its result, but in its method. It thus comes about that morality has been brought within the purview of science, and is dealt with under the name of ethics. The discoveries of ethical science have the closest bearing upon the claims of religion in this sphere. From the researches of such workers as Edward Westermarck we learn that morality commences in custom, the force of which is the ultimate moral sanction, and that custom arises out of the necessities of tribal life. Its gradual development can be traced best in the light of the theory of evolution, those customs which tend towards the disintegration of society containing the seeds of their own destruction, while

the superior survival value of customs making for harmony achieves their perpetuation. Praise and blame (Westermarck speaks of moral approval and moral indignation) develop as emotional reactions to certain types of behaviour in others, and eventually in oneself, and become more deeply embedded in the psychical make-up of the individual as time repeats the conditions of their existence. Societies in which moral approval acts in defiance of harmony will, in the long run, perish by internecine strife, leaving as the survivors those whose moral reactions are adapted to the continued existence of the social organism.

What applies to praise and blame applies likewise to all sides of the moral nature and to every type of moral fact. Thus it is seen that morality is simply a function of the social organism, that its growth comes from within and is determined by internal conditions. It is as much a part of the social organism as the heart and brain are parts of the individual organism. It never occurs to us to think of these as alien structures engrafted by external agency upon the body, lodging there, so to speak, nourished from an independent source, and in danger of extinction should this fount of nutrition dry up. In the case of morals such a view, presented to us by religion, seems to the scientific student equally absurd. He cannot see, from anything in his studies, how he should regard morals as descending upon Man from above, like rain from the heavens, guided by the hand of God through the channel of religion, and ourselves as threatened with a sudden drought if we should dare to tamper with the aqueduct through which is drawn the precious fluid. The conception may be picturesque, but it is hopelessly unscientific. Biology gives us certain principles of growth in the individual. Sociology, in the main, simply extends the field of operations. Certainly as regards the broad principles on which evolution takes place, we have no reason to reject their applicability to social facts. Herbert Spencer, in his synthetic philosophy, has demonstrated the great comprehensiveness of the principle of evolution. He is in no sense out-of-date, for this principle is to-day the dominant conception in all scientific interpretation of the world. The law of parsimony, then, forbids us, in tackling the problem of morality, to introduce gratuitous theories to explain what is already accounted for; particularly when we remember that these theories, in any case fantastic to enlightened vision, were not built out of the facts they purport to explain, but in reality preceded any knowledge of them, and are thrust upon us only because allegiance to tradition bids us find a home for them. One of the results, then, of a study of moral evolution is to dispel the idea that religion is the source of morals. Religion, like morality, has its own distinct evolution, traceable through the science of religious anthropology. There again, we unearth the roots of our subject buried deep in primitive soil, this time explicable in terms of what Tylor called the "psychological blunder" of primitive men. The idea of revelation as a gift of religious truth from above takes its place along with correspondingly obsolete theories of morals; and religion, far from appearing as the source of morals, is represented, in so far as it deals with conduct, as the mere expression of contemporary moral tendencies. If, by some fantastic stroke, the moral constituent could be torn from out the social organism, then the ethical side of religion would automatically disappear; but, on the other hand, if religion were suddenly removed, as by magic, from the life of Man, morality would only show a superficial effect, less noticeable as life becomes increasingly secularized.

It is true that religion has succeeded in getting itself very much mixed up with morals, and it is not

too harsh an indictment to say that it has exploited morality in the interests of the Church. Teaching Man that the Church was, if I may use a light phrase, the Pooh Bah of morals, religion has, in the past, set Man's moral nature to till ecclesiastical furrows. His loyalty, his devotion, his desire to do the right thing, have been yoked to many a chariot driven on an evil errand, but his moral sense never got the chance to rebel because he could not think that it was separable from the interests or independent of the dictates of the Church. How different the position when Man discovers the true foundations of conduct! There comes to him the inspiring revelation (this time scientific) that morality is after all not an adopted child but his own, and that its character depends first upon its heredity and afterwards upon the care bestowed on its upbringing. With what tenderness he will look upon this offspring of his flesh and blood; with what sympathy and genial tolerance he will observe and correct its faults, for they are his faults, and the faults of his forefathers. With what zeal he will guard it from exploitation at the hands of any who would turn its instincts into perverse channels. Moreover, once awarded the custody of the child, the parent will himself grow in moral stature, in a sense of dignity and responsibility. For too long has he been told that he is unfit to manage his own house, that he is a miserable sinner, and that there is no health in him. For too long has he been taught that, but for the eternal vigilance of his divine tutor, his morals would go to rack and ruin. What a degrading doctrine! What a confession of failure on the part of the tutor!

But even if we did not understand these things through scientific study, we could yet arrive at them through the mere observations of everyday life and the mere exercise of common sense. It is a manifest truth for all who have eyes to see that our moral feelings in no way depend upon our religious beliefs. Divest the decent fellow of belief in God and you do not imbue him with degraded impulses. He is the same fellow afterwards that he was before. People are not good-hearted, we are thankful to say, because God enjoins kindness. The boot is on the other foot. God becomes more humane as mankind grows more civilized. The more clearly decent folk realize the deep and stable foundation of their moral nature, the better for a world that is at present feeling for a foothold on something secure and permanent. In such circumstances it is pathetic, it would be comic if it were not so tragic, to hear ministers talking as if the age-long virtues of the human heart were the direct product of the Thirty-nine Articles.

If what I say is true, then religion fails on two counts at least: Firstly, the Bible is discredited as a text book of knowledge, and secondly, the claim of religion to be the fount of morals falls to the ground. We find that for instruction in the processes of life we go to the libraries of science, and for guidance in the matter of conduct we may turn to any reputable institution run on secular lines, the enlightened home or the well-ordered school amply serving our purpose.

MEDICUS.

(To be continued.)

WAR

In the purer ages of the (Roman) Commonwealth the use of arms was reserved for those ranks of citizens who had a country to love, a property to defend, and some share in enacting those laws which it was their interest as well as their duty to maintain. But in proportion as the public freedom was lost in extent of conquest war was gradually improved into an art and degraded into a trade.—Gibbon.

The Way of the World

During the hearing of a case at Bromley, before Judge Konstam, it transpired that an employer had put a clock in a van, unknown to the driver, which checked the times taken on each journey. The judge was indignant, and said, shamefully "Un-English." Now we are wondering, if this was un-English, seeing that it was an Englishman who was being denounced, whether this action was French, or Italian, or German, or Dutch? Clearly, if it was un-English, then it must have been characteristic of some other country, and as the language of a Judge should be accurate, we suggest that in future, Judge Konstam should say definitely that this or that action is really French, or American, or tell us distinctly what it is. Personally, we have laboured under the apparent delusion that Englishmen, or Frenchmen, or Irishmen or Turks, may commit all sorts of actions. They certainly do, but it seems that when a Frenchman knocks his wife about it is un-French, and when an Englishman does it, it is un-English, and so on world without end. So we are still in the dark as to what is an English action and what is an un-English one. Perhaps we ought to say that the stupidity of the Judge's comment is un-English, although, if we were in France we should say it is un-French. But then we imagine that we might meet with the report that stupidity is characteristic of many in every nation under the sun. We had better leave it at that.

Some time ago the Government appointed a number of commissioners who were to report on the condition of the "derelict areas," such as Jarrow-on-Tyne. The reports have been made, but it has been decided that certain parts of the reports are to be kept secret. In this way it is hoped the public will be able to form an *independent opinion* on the situation. It was the celebrated Dooley who said of President Kruger, that if he had been in the President's place he would have given the Outlanders the vote, but have done the counting himself. We suggest that to the Government. It might save a lot of trouble, if after the votes have been cast at a General Election that Mr. Macdonald was appointed to do the counting, and merely announced the result. He could surely be trusted to give a result, and it would secure continuity of policy.

It is generally admitted that where Government contracts are in question there exist very often certain firms that may be favoured, because of influence exerted in high quarters—that is, in every country but ours. Where even such a suggestion is made concerning this country a prompt and authoritative denial is at once issued. For instance. At the American enquiry into the "arms racket," a statement was made, on the basis of a letter alleged to have been written by one of the firm of Vickers-Armstrong, that the firm had a friend in the Admiralty, who could secure contracts for submarines. In the House of Commons, the First Lord of the Admiralty said there was not a word of truth in the statement. The orders were placed with various firms, and were in accordance with the usual practice. The First Lord of the Admiralty also welcomed investigation, and it would be found that the orders had been divided between several firms. That is quite satisfactory, for anyone can see that if the orders were divided, then the fact of any one of the firms getting its share of the orders because it had a friend in office is decisively disproved. The case is clear. If it is alleged that one of several firms secured an order through favouritism, then the fact that the other firms did not get theirs through favouritism, the statement that the remaining firm was favoured must be false. And could one have clearer proof that the official implicated in the charge could not have secured the order for a particular firm, than the fact of the order being given is there in the official books? If the American enquiry had proceeded on these lines, a very grave scandal might have been avoided.

CYNICUS.

Squaring the Circle

CHRISTIANITY undoubtedly fosters intellectual dishonesty, and of the followers of that superstition it may be said, as Mark Twain said of the French Legion of Honour, few escape it.

Any man inheriting honesty from both parents, and in addition being brought up in an atmosphere where humbug and hypocrisy were not constantly given expression to by his parents, may consider himself lucky. For children ape their parents in habit of thought just as they do in gesture. It must be very rare indeed for two honest parents to find their children thinking in terms of deceit and humbug. If so, it will nearly always be due to fear, the fear of a hiding, which causes children to lie more than anything else. This is perfectly natural, and due to our evolutionary descent, based on self-preservation, and the avoidance of pain. The beating of a child for telling a natural lie is a Christian triumph.

If, as in the case of Christian belief we postulate a number of imaginary facts, and accept them as true without evidence, we cannot escape spending the rest of our lives trying to harmonize the impossibilities thus set up, by weakening our sense of truth. This is the position of most clergymen; and not only do they ruin their own sense of logic on big questions, but the habit is likely to spread into all their lines of thought: except one, the one in which the human race are universally logical, and that is about losing money. Men never make a mistake in the logic of a proposition when it involves money being drawn or lost out of their pockets. Their stupid reasoning about a God and religion is due to the fact that these beliefs do not directly affect their physical well-being. But they allow them to affect their mental habits, imagining that it is better to pretend to believe in a thing they like even if it is not true, rather than give up pretending to believe it: that is, weakening the sense of logic and intellectual honesty.

To reason correctly it is vital to be sure of our premises. If the fundamental facts of our proposition are wrong, no amount of reasoning will bring us to the truth. To reach the conclusions we wish for, we have no other alternative but to "twist," and so square the circle. This is just the difference between reasoning about evolution, and about such things as the life hereafter, spirits, souls, etc., in regard to which hazy verbal expressions are used as bases from which extraordinary conclusions which we wish to be true are drawn. We are thus hopelessly involved in the field of intellectual dishonesty.

Y.C.

Correspondence

THE WORKING CLASS

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Is it really a fact that the working classes find it difficult to obtain birth-control knowledge? Does the story, told so feelingly by Mr. G. F. Green, of the workers breeding like rabbits and grasping in vain for the knowledge which will open up a new world to them, really describe the facts? I doubt it. The Birth-Control Movement does not have to work underground. Contraceptives are advertised and sold openly. Birth-control literature can be had for the asking. A small library on the subject can be bought for less than the majority of workers spend yearly on cinemas, football and dog racing—not a heavy price to pay for the knowledge "to enable working women to establish the right to live."

Are the workers really so helpless as some people would have us believe? Are the reactionary capitalists, the reactionary trade union leaders and the reactionary churches the only villains of the piece? What about the reactionary workers? Are they blameless? Perhaps Mr. Green is unaware of it, but the working classes have a reputation for cuteness. They also have a way of hearing about the things they wish to hear about, and of

finding the money to buy the things they wish to buy. If birth-control knowledge and contraceptives are scarce in working-class circles it is because these things, like education and the writings of advanced thinkers, are not wanted, and not because they are unknown. It is not knowledge but character that is lacking.

HENRY LEWIS.

DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

SIR,—Sorry I was unable to reply last week. If Mr. G. H. Taylor will look up my article in the *Freethinker* for October 14, he will find that I used the expression "this is a rejection of the idea of mechanical Materialism," in defence of Büchner, and was not making a charge against Mr. Taylor's beloved mechanists.

Mr. Taylor's statement that he did not take exception to the opinion of Rudas, "that the laws of movement of society are, too, *in essence*, identical with the natural laws of movement," but was pointing out that it committed him to the mechanistic position, is rather curious. Is all motion mechanical?

I did not finally approve of the idea that the methods of *physics* will become universal. I objected to the correct methods of reasoning being claimed as the methods of physics when they belong to methodology in general. This is not altered, even if verifiable hypotheses have been reached quicker in physics than in other sciences.

What on earth a capitalist-scientist contradiction is I do not know, especially as science and scientists are as much in the power of capitalists as is anything else in a capitalist society.

Why not talk of a capitalist-theologian contradiction, or a capitalist-economist contradiction?

There are many contradictions in capitalist society, but the scientist as such is not a contradiction. He is, like anyone else, part of that society.

The chief contradiction is found in the relation of capital to labour. The bourgeoisie, with followers and supporters on the one hand; and the proletariat with allies on the other.

What Mr. Taylor must try to realize is the fact that the scientist, as an individual, may be on the one side or the other. He will then, no doubt, further realize that in postulating "a rival group" of scientists to his group I was dealing with his thesis, by bringing his scientists back into their dialectical position in society, instead of leaving them in the air as an abstract body of scientists out of all relationship to the society to which they belong.

Scientists, as such, are no more free from the general social ideology of the society to which they belong than are other people. Some may be class-conscious; some may be even proletarian class-conscious: but Mr. Taylor's idea of a body of scientists being able to bring about a complete Socialist society by acting as an oligarchy with "potent means of destruction" is as fantastic as the "potent means of love" attributed to Jesus.

If the world could have been reconstructed by a small body of men organizing everything for the best, the job could have been done long ago.

Social reconstruction (not reform) depends on mass movements, leaders notwithstanding.

Then what about Mr. Taylor's proletariat to which "Freethought" is a closed book? Of what value is Mr. Taylor's "Freethought," if it seeks to ignore the social conditions and forces?

Oligarchy in Russia! Nay, lad, nay.

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

CREDULITY AND SPIRITUALISM

SIR,—I have read with amusement, not unmixed with some less complimentary emotion, Mr. Cutner's articles on credulity in connexion with Spiritualism. Mr. Cutner would be well advised to realize that an offensive complacency does not constitute wisdom, or an expert knowledge of profound subjects. His reference to Spiritualism are full of inaccuracies and mis-statements, and his association of Spiritualism with necromancy would be laughable if it were in a less serious context.

A typical instance of Mr. Cutner's peculiar disregard of fact is his assertion that Home's levitations were accomplished on the evidence of my father, the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The actual witnesses of the better-known instances of Home's remarkable powers were four reputable gentlemen—two peers and two army officers—all men whose testimony is at least as valuable as Mr. Cutner's.

Apart from his references to Spiritualism, Mr. Cutner querulously asks a series of questions regarding astrology, none of which he can answer. Mr. Cutner's self-adopted attitude of sitting in judgment upon subjects of such comprehensive magnitude as Spiritualism and Astrology is as incongruous as it is inflated. True facts cannot be altered or affected by Mr. Cutner's inability to recognize or understand them. He has the temerity to ridicule such great subjects, which he, with his extremely limited vision, is quite unable to focus or to visualize. Such an obstructionist attitude as Mr. Cutner's is almost invariably induced by one of two causes: Either from an intense materialistic prejudice, or else through the unfortunate possession of a sclerosed brain. Presumably only the former applies in Mr. Cutner's case. Understanding and conviction of the true facts of Spiritualism is a manifest impossibility to one whose sense of evidence is atrophied, and there are many like Mr. Cutner, who deliberately shut the windows and pull down the blinds of their minds, in order to avoid letting in the light of a fresh knowledge, which will mean a complete and unwelcome readjustment and reconstruction of a lifetime of preconceived theories.

One wonders what are Mr. Cutner's credentials which confer upon him the right to ridicule the mature conclusion of numerous men of the highest scientific repute, men who have formed their conclusions as the result of years of exhaustive investigation and penetrating research.

"The spirit of scepticism," for which Mr. Cutner pleads so ineptly is the identical spirit which prompted the historical refusal of those prelates who declined to look through the telescope of Galileo—a refusal which still provides a classic example of reactionary and preconceived prejudice. It was this same "spirit of scepticism," of which Mr. Cutner is such a devoted adherent, which has bitterly opposed almost every great innovation, from Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood to modern heavier than air machines.

In conclusion, I may say that this letter represents my final contribution to the discussion of credulity in connexion with Spiritualism, as a prolongation of controversy with one possessed of Mr. Cutner's highly questionable taste and amazing, if unconscious, powers of misrepresentation would prove unprofitable both to your readers and to myself.

DENIS P. S. CONAN DOYLE.

FREETHINKERS AND AFFIRMATION

SIR,—In your last issue you rebuke me somewhat tartly for writing to the War Office on the subject of recruits under the Act of 1888, but it was clear from correspondence I had received, that some soldiers and prospective soldiers were not, and it also appeared from this correspondence that the military authorities were not allowing the right of affirmation, as conceded in 1888, to be acted upon. It was in order to clear up the second point that I communicated with the War Office, and it was in order to remove possible misapprehensions in the minds of soldiers or would-be soldiers, that the statement on the subject was made in *The Literary Guide*. In fact, it appears that both in communicating with the War Office and making public the result thereof, I was only following your own excellent example, as quoted by you, in 1914. Why, then, your rebuke? Snipe the enemy, by all means, but spare your friends!

ERNEST THURTLÉ.

[We were not "sniping" our friends, merely adding emphasis to the fact, although we must confess that we felt a momentary annoyance at asking the War Office whether recruits were *required* to take the oath. For our part we merely reminded the War Office of the law with a threat of reprisals if the law was ignored.—EDITOR.]

Obituary

PETER KEITH CLARKE COTTON

It is my regretful duty to chronicle the death of Peter Keith Clarke Cotton, the only son of Horace and Hilda Cotton, which has plunged the parents and near relatives into the most poignant sorrow. The child was almost seven months old when he died suddenly on October 29, early in the morning.

At the request of the father, his colleague—Mr. H. I. Bayford—gave a brief address devoid of any theological references, whilst another co-worker—Mr. B. Heaton—officiated at the organ.

The family have our deepest sympathy in the loss they have sustained.—W.C. (Manchester).

Society News

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S.

At the General Meeting of the Manchester Branch some important business was conducted, and it was resolved that the *minimum* subscription be reduced to 2s. 6d. per annum.

This decrease should result in an influx of new members—there are numerous sympathizers who have hitherto refrained from active association with the Branch, and it is hoped that they will now come forward and give us their active support. The half-crown is a minimum subscription—and as finance is an ever-present need, those who can afford a higher sum will materially assist in maintaining, and extending, our propaganda.

Membership Forms and Lecture Syllabus may be had at our meetings, or from the Secretary, Mr. W. Collins, 4 The Bungalows, Hayfield, near Stockport.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON.

OUTDOOR.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead) : 11.30, Sunday, November 11, Mr. L. Ebury.

FINCHLEY (King Edward Hall, Church End, Finchley, N.3) : 7.0, Chapman Cohen—"Things Christians Ought to Know."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park) : 12.30, Sunday, Mr. W. B. Collins. 3.30, Messrs. Wood, Bryant, Collins and Tuson. 6.30, Mr. Wood (W.P.). Wednesday, 7.30, Messrs. Wood, Bryant, Collins and Tuson. *Freethinker* on sale outside Park gates, and literature to order.

INDOOR.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (New Morris Hall, Hall No. 5, 79 Bedford Road, Clapham, S.W.4) : 7.30, Mr. Jack Cohen (League of Socialist Freethinkers)—"The Futility of Non-Political Freethought."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road) : 7.0, Prof. A. Davies—"Individual and Group Morality."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) : 11.30, Joseph McCabe—"This Tide in Man's Affairs."

STUDY CIRCLE (68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4) : 8.0, Monday, November 12, Mr. Edward Gee—"Roman Catholicism in Mediterranean Lands."

THE METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Conway Hall, 49 Theobalds Road, W.C.) : 7.0, Mr. E. C. Saphin—"Does Christ Matter?"

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. ("The Laurie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.) : 7.30, Archibald Robertson—"The Modern War of Ideologies."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRKENHEAD (Wirral) BRANCH N.S.S. (Boilermakers' Hall, Argyle Street, Birkenhead, opposite Scala Cinema, entrance in Lorn Street) : 7.0, E. Egerton Stafford (Bootle)—"Russia and Religion."

(Continued on page 719)

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(Continued from page 718)

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Bristol Street Schools): 7.0, Mr. A. D. McLaren (London)—"The Consecrated Lie."

BLACKBURN BRANCH N.S.S. (Cobden Hall, Cort Street): 7.30, Mr. Margerison—"The Road to Utopia."

BRADFORD SECULAR SOCIETY (Godwin Commercial Hotel, Godwin Street): 7.0, Mr. John Barnshaw—"The Function of Government."

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (Phoenix Theatre, Market Street, Burnley): 2.45, Mr. J. T. Brighton (Chester-le-Street)—"Civilized Savagery." 7.0, Dr. C. H. Ross Carmichael—"Body and Soul." A lantern lecture.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (McLellan Galleries, 270 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, League of Nations Union Lecture: Mr. David Crawford—"Social and Humanitarian Activities."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Dramatic Performance by the Secular Players: "The Editor," by B. Bjornson.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Milton Hall, 12a Daulby Street, Liverpool, off London Road, by the Majestic Cinema): 7.0, George Garrett (Liverpool)—"Religion and the Drama."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Clarion Cafe, Market Street, Manchester): 7.30, J. V. Shortt (Liverpool)—"The Psychological Heritage of Religion."

PLYMOUTH BRANCH N.S.S. (Plymouth Chambers, Drake Circus): 7.30, Mr. Cargeege—"The Illusion of Progress."

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Green Street): 7.0, Anti-War Meeting. Mr. A. Flanders will speak for N.S.S.

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