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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

Table with 2 columns: Article Title and Page. Includes 'Dying like a Christian—The Editor', 'Henry Stephens Salt—Mimmermus', etc.

Views and Opinions

Dying like a Christian

THE death and funeral of Mr. E. W. Gibbs, a well-known Sheffield architect, has been given much notice in the newspaper press, both London and Provincial.

I hope that the minister, if he accepts responsibility of conducting my funeral, will do so in the simplest possible manner, remembering that I die an Agnostic, believing and standing in awe of the Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed.

With the most profound reverence and worship of the Great Unknown cause and Sustainer of all things I declare myself an Agnostic. And recognizing the moral law I apprehend that there is a Great Cause Incomprehensible, known but not understood.

I am too well acquainted with the curious phrasing adopted by many Agnostics to be surprised at this language. The Agnostics that I have known—either in person or through their writings—may be divided into two main groups and a subordinate one.

second call themselves by that name because they avow they are not sure whether there is a God or not, and so remain seated on the fence debating whether there is a this side and another side to it.

* * *

A Hopeless State

Mr. Gibb's Agnosticism does not really interest me very much, although I am mildly wondering why he did not consider his belief in a Great Unknown Cause and Sustainer of the Universe an equivalent of the Christian God.

But I am curious as to how one comes to know an incomprehensible? Incomprehensibility is not something to be known; it stands for a mental blank. And if it is not understood how can it be known?

* * *

As Good as a Christian

The minister who conducted the funeral said that :—

Mr. Gibbs was more of a practical Theist and more of a Christian than many who so profess themselves.

I have no doubt that in saying this the minister considered he was paying Mr. Gibbs a great compliment, as do so many Christians when they inform the world that a Freethinker may be as good as a Christian. The Christian who talks in this way imagines he is paying the Freethinker a compliment, when he is really offering an insult. He fancies he is exhibiting a wide toleration, when he only succeeds in being impertinent. I have never observed that Christians, either individually, or collectively as they appear in history, have managed to exhibit so lofty a degree of character than an ordinary man might despair of attaining to such eminence. There have, of course, been many excellent men who have called themselves Christians, but these have been matched by the number of unconscionable blackguards whose profound belief in Christianity admitted of no question. And if I am told that many who did not believe in Christianity have also been scoundrels, I would endorse the statement without a single quiver.

There have been good men who believed in Christianity, and also bad ones. There have been good men who rejected Christianity, and also bad ones. On this score honours are equal; and I see no reason why they should not be. I do not believe that Christians have a monopoly of bad characters, although I do not recognize the power of belief in the Christian religion in making good ones. But I do wish that Christians would awaken to the fact that with most Freethinkers it is precisely the moral aspect of Christianity that wakens the earliest form of the revolt against it. I know there are some peculiar Freethinkers who take it as a compliment to be told by believers that they are as good as Christians, but these I think belong to the type of Irishman who likes to disguise his nationality, or the kind of Jew who loves to be told that he does not look like one. Any Freethinker worth his salt knows that morality is quite independent of Christianity, and that whatever decent human morality exists with Christianity has been forced upon it by the fact that every system is bound to acknowledge the value of those elementary ethical qualities upon which the welfare of society depends, or finds itself rejected. "Pure Christianity" means a Christianity that has been separated from everything of a non-religious character, just as pure oxygen means an oxygen that is separated from all else, and not an oxygen that is mixed up with a number of other things. When a Freethinker speaks of Christianity he should mean a Christianity that is not adulterated with other beliefs; and when he speaks of "true Christianity" he should mean a Christianity by itself, and not a Christianity plus a number of other things that secular civilization has forced upon the Churches. Those who have capably studied the history of Christianity and the nature of morals, know that while Christianity exerted no beneficial effect on conduct, it has very frequently had a directly contrary effect. A man is not better than he would be because he is religious, but he is very frequently worse for it because it provides a cover for practices that would otherwise show themselves in all their ugliness. What is there that provides so ample a cloak for the vice of intolerance as religion? and what religion is there that does this quite so effectually as Christianity? What religion other than Christianity has made the slandering of opponents such a recognized art? And if the nature of morality is not so well recognized as it might be, what else but Christianity is so largely responsible for the fact?

A Lesson for Freethinkers

I do not know that I should have troubled to write about this funeral of Mr. Gibbs, about whom I know nothing more than has appeared in the papers, but for the consideration that the publicity given to his funeral does provide a lesson for Freethinkers in general. Mr. Gibbs died confessing himself to be an Agnostic, but that alone would not have given the occasion for publicity had it not been accompanied with a lot of intellectual gibberish which was actually of a quite religious nature. As I have already said, had he died asking for the absence of any sort of religious service, and had he called himself an Atheist, that would have given no ground for newspaper publicity—unless he had been a convicted criminal, in which case he would have been held up as an example for the world to avoid.

But every year there are thousands of Freethinkers who die without taking the precaution to see that their memory is not insulted by having conducted over their corpses a religious service which they ignored while they were alive. Up and down the country there are hundreds of thousands of non-religious parents who permit their children to be taught religion in the schools because they hesitate to let their neighbours know what their opinions really are. A little more courage shown in the face of a religious public opinion would help considerably in reducing Christian arrogance to smaller proportions. What ground Freethought has won in the past, and what ground is held in the present, is not in consequence of trying to show Christians that we are honoured by their patronage, but by the resolve to express our opinions whenever it becomes necessary to do so. If Freethinkers really wish Christians to pay them proper respect they must show themselves strong enough to command it. But to live one's life, never letting one's neighbours know what one's opinions are; to permit one's children to be taught a religion which one believes to be among the greatest evils that have afflicted mankind, and then to be buried with the sanctimonious epitaph, "He was as good as a Christian," is a fitting close to a life thus spent. But what an end!

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Henry Stephens Salt

"Write me as one that loves his fellow men."

Leigh Hunt.

"It is not the hoofs and pistol-butts of a regiment of horse that can change one tittle of a ploughman's thoughts."—*Stevenson.*

GOVERNMENTS confer Iron Crosses and Victoria Crosses for distinguished acts of physical courage, but someday, we hope, they will confer a decoration for moral courage, which is rarer and finer. For, in the Army of Human Liberation, as Heine so finely calls it, the soldiers fight not to shed blood, but to dry up tears; not to kill their fellow-men, but to raise them up. And one great living reformer would deserve instant recognition, for Mr. Henry Stephens Salt has advocated for well over a half century the principle of humaneness, which must be considered as an essential part of any intelligible improvement of modern society.

Indeed, the life-work of Mr. Salt places him definitely among the vital forces of progress. A pioneer among pioneers, he is one of the foremost heralds of a new era. Thinking men and women treasure his books, and look with appreciative eyes at the work he has done. For he has devoted a lengthy life to the service of his fellows, and his significance

in modern literature and thought cannot be ignored.

This great social reformer was born in 1851 in India, and his career has touched life at many angles. Educated at Eton College, where he later became one of the house-masters, and also at Cambridge University, he absorbed all that old-world culture could offer. Even in those very early days he never completely acquiesced in the old order of things, such as was dominant at those old-fashioned seats of learning in the last century. For the young master read, not only the classical writers of Greece and Rome, but also Shelley's lyrics of liberty, and the audacities of Henry Thoreau and Walt Whitman. In such company young Mr. Salt soon looked beyond the quadrangles of Eton and her medieval ideals, and began to scan far horizons and watch the unalterable stars.

His striking talents and widespread philanthropy began to be noticed, although he took as much pains to avoid personal publicity as most men do to ensure it. From the far-off days of the iconoclastic Shelley Society, at one of whose meetings Bernard Shaw avowed himself an Atheist, to the proud, full days of the Humanitarian League (1890-1918), Mr. Salt was ever in the van of progress, and challenged contemporary convention at many points. His outlook had broadened during the intervening years, until he conceived human society as a great brotherhood, but the underlying unity is not merely economic. It was not merely the apotheosis of an enlightened selfishness, but an ethical fraternity, where love and mutual service are to be confidently expected:—

"Till each man finds his own in all men's good,
And all men work in noble brotherhood."

This optimistic faith is not to be limited to one race or species, but extended to the whole world of innocent beings. And herein lies the splendid genesis of the Humanitarian League, with which Mr. Salt's name is inseparably associated. So all-embracing was this movement, that, in comparison, many other lauded philanthropic societies appeared to be as ineffective as village slate-clubs. Some extent of the scope of the League's activities may be estimated by recalling that it dealt with such measures as Cruel Sports, Militarism, Criminal Law and Prison Reform, Humane Diet, Rational Dress, Flogging in the Army and Navy, Education of Children, the humanizing of the old harsh Poor Law, and many other needful reforms. In a nutshell, the distinctive purpose of the League was to consolidate the principle of humaneness.

It sounds very simple, but think of the work such an idea entailed. Some reformers content themselves with one single reform, but Mr. Salt sought to drive a whole team of them. He did so for nearly thirty years, and with such success that G. W. Foote, the Freethought leader, proclaimed the Humanitarian League "one of the noblest and most useful organizations in England," and as "the triumph of a great idea." The compliment was richly deserved, for the League co-ordinated many social activities.

Some reformers have, as Kipling expresses it, "too much ego in their cosmos." Not so Mr. Salt. Through all the tumult and shouting of propagandist work he has preserved a serene mind, an unconquerable optimism, and an inexhaustible interest in all human things. A very great reformer, his life has been devoted to a ceaseless whirl of activities. Though he ploughed a lonely furrow, he has never been morbid. Taking all things at their true worth, he has never been surprised by views he could not accept. He has merely acknowledged, urbanely, that they were so very different from his own. His humour, too, is delightful. What could be better

than his description of England's ideal in education as being "brawn, not brains"; or his description of public-schools as "nurseries of Toryism?" This quiet humour is even displayed in his charming book of verse, *Consolations of a Faddist*. As if a man of his rare genius were to be compared for a moment with the momoniacs who believe that the English people are the lost ten tribes, or that millions now living will never die.

Make no mistake; under less strenuous conditions he might have made a great name for himself in literature. His illuminative monographs on Shelley, Richard Jefferies, De Quincey, Henry Thoreau, and James Thomson, prove his devotion to letters. His scholarship, too, is apparent in his fine rendering of *The Treasures of Lucretius*, a perfect tribute to the noblest of the old Roman poets. In another and lighter vein he has emulated George Borrow, and his *On Cambrian and Cumbrian Hills* is not without a real touch of genius, and is on its way to becoming a classic.

Meanwhile, modern society is not yet a brotherhood, despite the posters outside churches, chapels, and tin-tabernacles. It is divided into mutually antagonistic classes. Tyranny, crime, and war prevail, and how to remove them is the question of questions. Not by bloody revolution, thinks Mr. Salt, but rather by peaceful evolution. While it is true that there is no set programme warranted to cure all social ills, there are great principles to be followed. Love is the principle that, by its superior, attractive power, will draw to itself the virtue and strength which selfishness has before absorbed. In this way, the greed which produces crime and misery enough, and so many forms of social unrest, will be banished through the power of a new, stronger, and nobler spirit. The pioneers have shown the way. When great questions have to be answered, may we, in our turn, deal with them with the same fervour and the same insight as the great and clear-eyed leaders:—

"Who knew the seasons when to take
Occasion by the hand, and make
The bounds of freedom wider."

It is not only as a fine writer, however, but as an apostle of kindness that Mr. Salt will be remembered for many a year. The phase of his activities which will appeal most widely is his many years' dauntless championship of the Humanitarian movement and of the rights of animals. He will always be remembered as the chivalrous knight-errant ever seeking out forlorn, oppressed, or distressed causes, in whose behalf to break a lance, on whom to lavish his passion for pity, and satisfy his yearning for useful service. Mr. Salt's whole lengthy career is a most eloquent discourse on the absolute indispensability of reformers, who, more even than the poets, are "the unacknowledged legislators of mankind." For in the happy time to come the stormy note of battle will be changed to the triumphant music of victory. And it will be due in every case to the essential message of the reformers, whose dreams of a less imperfect social state will have come true.

MIMNERMUS.

In action one must compromise with circumstances, but we can at least compromise in the right direction. Half a loaf may be better than nothing at all to a man who is starving. That is a compromise between an empty stomach and a full meal. But half a brick is not a compromise, it is an insult.

"Opinions," Chapman Cohen.

As Others See Us

SOMETHING is always happening to make us think. This afternoon, as I was plodding my way round a list of visits just heavy enough to let me know that the Winter had arrived in earnest, my mind reverted to a letter that appeared in the *Freethinker* of November 24: above the name of W. Don Fisher. It concerned the profession of which I am a member, and it made me feel that Mr. Fisher had furnished a very real contribution to Freethought. As a doctor I am acquainted from inside with medical work and the medical outlook, and I can assure Mr. Fisher that his letter was of profound interest to me. If it did nothing else it set me thinking. As a Freethinker I am very familiar with descriptions of the clergy current in Freethought circles, but I am not a clergyman, and have never had the opportunity to compare these accounts with clerical life in any more intimate way than is made possible by social intercourse. Here at last, then, was something of which I could judge from extensive and personal knowledge. I read Mr. Fisher's letter twice. Briefly, the way in which it set me thinking was this: If our accounts of clerical life compare in their general tone, in the spirit of their outlook and the accuracy of their representation, with Mr. Fisher's account of the medical world, what must the more educated section of the clergy think of us? And then came the further thought: If our accounts of life in general even roughly correspond in complexion to Mr. Fisher's letter, what must the man-in-the-street think of us? Assuredly Mr. Fisher had drawn our attention to a very important side of Freethought. Being without gods, were we bereft of the gift the gods wad gie us? Did we, in fact, share with Mr. Fisher that attitude of his which he likened to "the vehemence evinced by martyrs of religious non-conformity?" It was worth thinking about. As a movement we are accustomed to claim for ourselves a certain catholicity of outlook. Rescued by our Atheism from the narrowness of dogma, no longer imprisoned within a territory bounded on one side by the chapel, and on the other by the village pump, we might expect as individuals to develop a certain bigness, a tolerance, an urbanity in the exercise of which we should gradually lose all affinity with the sectarian spirit. If we have not done so, if we can still look at life through coloured glasses, merely preferring one colour to another, how does it come about?

Probably the secret, or at all events a great part of it, lies in the fact that we in the Freethought movement are propagandists. I suppose it is inevitable that we should be so, but that makes it all the more needful for us to be awake to the evils of propaganda; for it is only by recognizing these that we can avoid some of the ills that propagandist flesh is heir to. On the one hand it has to be granted, in our behoof, that Freethought still meets with sufficient opposition to remain militant. But having said this it behoves us to remember that our aspirations point towards the broader life in the long run. Our militancy is a means to an end, and it is actually part of our philosophy to emphasize the tendency of every means to become an end in itself, and by so doing to defeat its object. That is one of our criticisms of the Communist policy in relation to Freethought. Ideally we should be able to pursue a line of action not in itself ultimately desirable, and then suddenly switch over at the appropriate moment to the desirable course. But in fact this is not possible, for the reason that in the early stages of the process we develop mental and moral characteristics consistent with our behaviour, and these, having become part

of our organic nature, cannot be shed at a moment's notice. By the law of inertia they persist and impede our progress towards the higher emancipation. It has always seemed to me that this difficulty especially assails the propagandist. The single-minded character of his life and work inevitably narrows his field of vision. When a pioneer is blazing a trail he looks neither to the right nor to the left, but straight ahead.

In the case of the Freethinker, however, this extreme concentration of purpose will not do. He represents the movement towards the complete secularization of life, and it is his proud claim that a completely secularized life will turn out to be a complete life from every human standpoint. But because he does not advance his cause through faith he must rely especially on works, and his personal example of the life he preaches becomes correspondingly important. That is why he must be more than a trail-blazer. He must be the concrete and work-a-day expression of the secular philosophy. This means that he must be broad, tolerant, urbane, cosmopolitan; and if he should happen to keep bees he must take care that they do not hive in his bonnet.

When all is said and done, sectarianism can have a secular as well as a religious meaning. We can be sectarian in politics, in tastes, in morals and in ways of living. A certain sectarianism is inevitable if we are to remain private individuals, but it will escape being harmful if we confine it to departments of feeling, in which case it will merely emerge in the form of preferences, taking good care to exclude it from departments of judgment. Cultured indeed is the man who can say, "These are not my tastes, but I understand them and acknowledge their place in the world."

As a striking example of the sectarian mind I recall an incident that took place at a Freethought lecture where I happened to occupy the platform. After the lecture, which had a bearing on the problem of morality, an old gentleman got up and very gravely put a question to me. He wanted to know whether I realized that a serious part of our moral problems today could be traced to the great licence permitted to dogs in the streets of our Empire? He wanted an assurance that, as a member of the Secular Movement, I would do something about it. I sympathized with his sensibilities, but it was difficult to see just what steps I should take to affect the manners and customs of the canine world. I felt, really, that an undue concentration of outlook had caused the old gentleman's philosophy to go to the dogs. Admittedly he was an extreme case, but his story may well serve as a cautionary tale. It is possible that in his early youth he started quite gently and only gained momentum as the years sped on. But it is clear that he had ended up in a pitiable cul-de-sac from which it was too late to retrace his steps.

But despite these warnings and misgivings we need not lose sight of the place of propaganda in life. The point is merely that it should be kept in proper perspective. It is a spirited steed that will bear our chariot far, but woe unto us if it gets the bit in its teeth! It would bolt with us, careering along side-tracks and into blind alleys, upsetting our balance, overthrowing our judgment, and in the end wrecking our purpose. And there we should lie, mere objects of pity, while saner minds drove past us on the firm ground of common sense.

MEDICUS.

As freedom is the only safeguard of Governments, so are order and moderation generally necessary to preserve freedom.—Macaulay.

Things Worth Knowing*

XXIV.

THE ILLUSION OF RELIGION

HAVING recognized religious doctrines to be illusions, we are at once confronted with the further question: may not other cultural possessions which we esteem highly, and by which we let our life be ruled, be of a similar nature? Should not the assumptions that regulate our political institutions likewise be called illusions, and is it not the case that in our culture the relations between the sexes are disturbed by a series of erotic illusions? . . . Nothing need keep us from applying observation to our own natures or submitting the process of reasoning to its own criticism . . . We surmise, too, that such an endeavour would not be wasted, and that it would at least partly justify our suspicions. But the author of these pages has not the means to undertake so comprehensive a task; forced by necessity he confines his work to the pursuit of a single one of these illusions, that is, the religious.

But now the loud voice of our opponent bids us to stop. We are called upon to account for our transgressions.

"Archæological interests are no doubt most praiseworthy, but one does not set about an excavation if one is thereby going to undermine occupied dwelling-places so that they collapse and bury the inhabitants under the ruins. The doctrines of religion are not a subject that one can be clever about, as one can about any other. Our culture is built up on them; the preservation of human society rests on the assumption that the majority of mankind believe in the truth of these doctrines. If they are taught that there is no almighty and just God, no divine world-order, and no future life, then they will feel exempt from all obligation to follow the rules of culture. Uninhibited and free from fear, everybody will follow his asocial, egoistic instincts, and will seek to prove his power. Chaos, which we have banished through thousands of years of the work of civilization, will begin again. . . . And apart from the danger of the undertaking, it is also a purposeless cruelty. Countless people find their one consolation in the doctrines of religion, and only with their help can they endure life. You would rob them of what supports them, and yet have nothing better to give them in exchange."

What a number of accusations all at once! However, I am prepared to deny them all; and what is more, I am prepared to defend the statement that culture incurs a greater danger by maintaining its present attitude to religion than by relinquishing it. But I hardly know where to begin my reply. . . .

And now we proceed with the defence. Clearly religion has performed great services for human culture. It has contributed much toward restraining the asocial instincts, but still not enough. For many thousands of years it has ruled human society; it has had time to show what it can achieve. If it had succeeded in making happy the greater part of mankind, in consoling them, in reconciling them to life, and in making them supporters of civilization, then no one would dream of

striving to alter existing conditions. But instead of this what do we see? We see that an appallingly large number of men are discontented with civilization and unhappy with it, and feel it as a yoke that must be shaken off; that these men will do everything in their power to alter this civilization, or else go so far in their hostility to it, that they will have nothing to do either with civilization or with restraining their instincts. . . .

It is doubtful whether men were in general happier when religious doctrines held unlimited sway than they are now; more moral they certainly were not. They have always understood how to externalize religious precepts, thereby frustrating their intentions. And the priests, who had to enforce religious obedience met them half-way. God's kindness must lay a restraining hand upon his justice. One sinned, and then one made oblation, or did penance, and then one was free to sin anew. Russian mysticism had come to the sublime conclusion that sin is indispensable for the full enjoyment of the blessing of divine grace, and therefore, fundamentally, it is pleasing to God. It is well-known that the priests could only keep the masses submissive to religion by making these great concessions to human instincts. . . .

Let us consider the unmistakable character of the present situation. We have heard the admission that religion no longer has the same influence on men that it used to have. And this, not because its promises have become smaller, but because they appear less credible to people. Let us admit that the reason—perhaps not the only one—for this change is the increase of the scientific spirit in the higher strata of human society. Criticism has nibbled at the authenticity of religious documents, natural science has shown up the errors contained in them, and the comparative method of research has revealed the fatal resemblance between religious ideas revered by us and the mental productions of primitive ages and peoples.

The scientific spirit engenders a particular attitude to the problems of this world: before the problems of religion it halts for awhile, then wavers, and finally here too steps over the threshold. In this process there is no stopping. The more the fruits of knowledge become accessible to men, the more widespread is the decline of religious belief, at first only of the obsolete and objectionable expressions of the same, then of its fundamental assumptions also. The Americans who instituted the monkey trial in Dayton have proved consistent. Elsewhere the inevitable transition is accomplished by way of half-measures and insincerities.

Culture has little to fear from the educated or the brain workers. In their case religious motives for civilized behaviour would be unobtrusively replaced by other and secular ones; besides they are for the most part themselves supporters of culture. But it is another matter with the great mass of the uneducated and suppressed, who have every reason to be enemies of culture. So long as they do not discover that people no longer believe in God, all is well. But they discover it, infallibly, and would do so even if this work of mine were not published. They are ready to accept the results of scientific thought, without having effected in themselves the process of change which scientific thought induces in men. Is there not a danger that these masses, in their hostility to culture, will attack the weak point which they have discovered in their task-master? If you must not kill your master, solely because God has forbidden it and will sorely avenge it in this or the other life, and you then discover that there is no God so that you need not fear his punishment, then you will certainly kill without hesitation, and you could only be prevented

* Under this heading we purpose printing, weekly, a series of definite statements, taken from authoritative works, on specific subjects. They will supply instructive comments on aspects of special subjects, and will be useful, not merely in themselves, but also as a guide to works that are worth closer study.

from this by mundane force. And so follows the necessity for either the most rigid suppression of these dangerous masses and the most careful exclusion of all opportunities for mental awakening, or a fundamental revision of the relation between culture and religion.

The Future of an Illusion,
by S. FREUD, pp. 59-69.

The Witch Mania

I.

IN all the interminable boasts of Christianity which fill our national papers, which are the subject of so many apologetic volumes, and which are broadcasted at every possible opportunity, few references will be found to the ferocious and religious persecution of witches during so many centuries of the Christian era. The plain fact is that Christians, that is, intelligent Christians, do not like to be reminded of it. It is a most uncomfortable chapter in the history of their divine faith. The savage torture and burning alive of hundreds and thousands of men, women and children, and, though it can hardly be believed, of animals too, is very difficult to excuse or even apologize for.

That there is rarely fire without smoke is taken as a matter of course; and it need hardly be said—as has always been recognized—that there was something more behind the whole story of witchcraft than a mere obsession to persecute and torture. Why were old women called witches in the first place? Why were there sorcerers or wizards, the male counterparts of the witch? What did they do or say that the vast majority of people in medieval Europe were frightened at the mere mention of the name of wizard or witch, trembled before the power of a curse, or an incantation? That there were some bold souls who laughed to scorn all the ghostly paraphernalia of these supposed consorts of demons even in those credulous times, is, of course, true; but they were very few in number and seem to have had very little influence. In every country in Europe people believed in the malefic influence of witches—one must add also, of the stars, of curses, and many other things. And the pathetic comment on it all is, that we, even in these days, seem hardly to have outgrown all this superstition.

Our national journals take a pride in providing columns for the predictions of astrologers. Clairvoyants will be interviewed so as to give us winners in classic races. Articles on the wonderful forecasts found in the fortuitous formation of tea leaves are welcomed. Pages are devoted to numerology, that extraordinary "science" which reveals the hidden depths of a philosophy based entirely on "vibrations" provided by a particular number calculated from the name fate—or your parents—gave you; or from your birth date. The young lady who can tell fortunes by playing cards is the greatest and most run-after asset at any party. Her predictions are gravely listened to—what the cards say is something inviolable.

It is not only in these "divinatory" arts that people believe. No one can deny the immense influence of spiritualism—for better or for worse. Seances are held all over the country, and the people who go are not particularly concerned with what are known as physical manifestations. They are persuaded that the medium has caused spirits to rise from the mighty deep—and these spirits are recognized. Men and women think—nay, are certain—that they have got

into touch with their beloved ones who have "passed over"; and they will not listen to any explanation that such may not be the case.

The truth is that, unconsciously or consciously, most people hope for some kind of immortality, and all these occult practices are resorted to in a faint belief of reaching something which will definitely prove it. To feel that death ends all, that the world and its treasures of life and beauty will be blotted out forever for mankind, is something many men and women throughout the ages do not like to think inevitable. The success of almost any religion is assured if one of the prizes for believers is immortality—not merely the *hope* of immortality, but immortality itself.

And when we go back through history, we find that humanity, in fundamentals at least, has not changed. This hope of living on after death, somewhere, anywhere, was as great with the ancients as with us. It was a hope greatly prized by the priests of all religions. It provided the most certain of all bases for the continuance of religion and its priests; and it was fostered with the utmost care.

But it was not only the heavenly unseen world after death that was fostered in the hearts of the people. They were never allowed to forget that there was another world, a baneful world, a world inhabited by demons and devils, by evil and malignant spirits, whose sole aim was to capture and torment human souls, particularly after death. No realm was so magnificently advertised by priests as this underworld. Its existence and its terrors formed part of the stock-in-trade of almost all religious hierarchies.

The "Heaven" and "Hell" business was, of course, the natural outcome of the "good" and "evil" in the world. It was the result of man's fancies and imaginings, of the eternal fight between the "good" day and the "bad" night, between light and darkness, summer and winter, heat and cold, life and death, the eternal dualism in nature—a dualism which, in philosophy, teaches that everything carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction.

Just as the true God had his heaven and angels, so had the enemy, the Devil, the evil one, his followers. Just as the just God, the holy God, had his heaven, so had the Devil his hell. The picture of the two opposing forces was almost always insisted upon by the priests of religion; and in none so fiercely as in Christianity.

Christianity even at its inception could brook no rival—it can brook none this day. It and it alone was the true religion as any Christian priest will tell you. There was only one revelation from God—the true God, who must always be distinguished from all other gods by a capital initial letter—and Christians were the only people who received it. Jews had merely a partial revelation. But as even the one true faith was vigorously opposed by the adherents of other faiths—who somehow or other believed that they also had the one true religion—there was only one explanation possible for this opposition. It was due entirely to the wicked machinations of the Devil.

It is not difficult to understand that if man's early imaginings brought to life an ideal being—like Jesus or Krishna or Apollo—they could also visualize a Devil, the Evil One who was responsible for making some people, at least, laugh at the pretensions of religion in general, and later, at Christianity in particular. All, or nearly all, the early Church Fathers believed in the actual existence of the Devil and his myrmidons and blamed him for the evil which obviously existed in the world. There was no other possible explanation.

As Christianity opposed Paganism—Paganism was naturally of the Devil; and it is not surprising that

when the Church had pictorially to visualize its infernal opponent, it gave him, more or less, the features and characteristics of one of the Pagan deities who was specially obnoxious—Priapus or Pan, both of whom were particularly connected with what the Church has always considered a terrible sin—sexual lust. In addition the Devil was given a tail with a barbed point, possibly because Serapis is sometimes represented with such a tail; or perhaps because Scorpio in the Zodiac has one.

Whatever the worship of Priapus or Pan may have degenerated into, there can be little doubt that at one time it was, more or less, nature worship of some kind; perhaps, with Bacchus also, with what is known as the fertility-motive behind it. Moreover, if certain feasts and ceremonies always attended this worship among the common people, they were not likely to be eradicated even in the course of centuries. We see this, even at this day, in the perpetuation of our own festivals. Holly and mistletoe still accompany Christmas. The Easter egg is of paramount importance to the celebration of Easter. May-day must have been celebrated as a day of jollification from time immemorial, particularly in the colder or temperate climates. And even now, the may-pole is erected and danced joyously around by people who have not the least idea for what it originally stood.

I could go on giving far more details with reference, so to speak, to the *background* which formed a part of the witch cult; but it is not necessary. Suffice it to say that unless something of what I have indicated be understood, the almost universal belief in witches in medieval Europe cannot be really accounted for.

It was not merely based on an almost unquestioned belief in a beneficent deity; it was based also on a thorough belief in a maleficent nether world, pacts with which were responsible for much, if not all, the evil in the world. It was fostered by Christianity, and even this religion's most devoted sons can hardly look at the terrible consequences without shame and disgust.

H. CUTNER.

Acid Drops

By far the greatest saying of the week has been given to the world by President Roosevelt in the course of his address to Congress. It is a reference to the Nations of Europe:—

They have therefore impatiently reverted to the old belief in the law of the sword, or to the fantastic conception that they alone are chosen to fulfil a mission, that all others among the billion and a half human beings must and shall learn from and be subject to them.

That is indeed a pen picture of the Great Powers, which is true even though the United States were to be added to the list. "A chosen people," "carrying the banner of civilization," "spreading the gospel of Christ," "saving the heathen," these and other similar expressions that to all of us are so familiar, mask a process of which the campaign of Mussolini marks the latest phase; and always a cover for greed, exploitation and national megalomania.

But to be complete the deliverance of President Roosevelt's should have had attached to it the truth that for the past four hundred years no influence has been so powerful in moralizing the greed and brutality of the nations as the Christian Church. When Spain crushed out two civilizations in South America it did so with the blessing of the Roman Catholic Church. When England and the other nations of the world joined in the game of "expansion" and "colonization," it did so under the same religious pretence, which took on a more "moral" form as the influence of the theological excuses began to weaken. Italy in carrying its civiliza-

tion to Abyssinia is the latest page in this chapter, although the German phase, in which the old terms of superior race, inspired message, a new religion, etc., etc., play their parts with a slightly different form of expression. Whatever is done with it, this statement of the American President stands out against the miserable pretences and shilly-shallying dishonesties of our own politicians.

Still more does it stand out against the semi-idiotic, semi-knavish of our "great theologians." Consider the following:—

The Dean of Durham asserts that God carefully selects a clergyman and sets him apart from other people. If that is true with regards to an ordinary curate—for it was to a curate that the Bishop addressed his revelation, with how much greater truth must it apply to God's selection of a man for the job of an Archbishop.

And having considered that very knotty point, let the reader turn to the joint letter just issued by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and anyone will realize that the authors *must* have been selected because they actually were better fitted for the Church than for anything else. No ordinary man, or couple of men, would or could have produced such a document. These two men were selected by God, and it would not be too much to say that they are acting under the direct inspiration of God. That, we admit, is a very serious thing to say, but there are the facts.

The joint wisdom of these two selected of God informs the world that science and civilization are not enough to curb man's "natural instincts." Therefore it is plain:—

It is only a supernatural power which can ensure peace.

Well, what in the name of all that is episcopal prevents this supernatural power exerting its influence and securing peace on earth? Do the Archbishops mean that *Man* will not let God do as he wishes? Do they mean that the supernatural power will not exert itself until man has brought about peace by natural means? But if man brings peace about by natural means there is no need for the supernatural to interfere. God becomes a mere decorative "extra." For downright, unapproachable stupidity this New Year's message of the two Archbishops beats anything we have read for some time. It surpasses even the efforts of the Bishop of London, who when we knew him over forty years ago could be more kinds of a fool in five minutes than any other man we ever came across.

The Catholic *Universe*, in a retrospect of 1935 admits, "Religious belief and practice are admittedly decaying." In spite of this it claims that the picture on the other side is one "that must make the enemies of religion realize that it is they who will eventually be found on the losing side." The picture is: "Church openings continue to go on at the rate of about one a week, each one a new fortress against unbelief." Well, it can only be a fortress if it is properly and efficiently manned for battle; and does anyone outside an asylum imagine that this is the case? None of the new churches dare allow an anti-religious discussion to take place within its walls, and the way these churches generally fight "unbelief" is by absolute silence. But if the new churches are such wonderful fortresses, why is religion decaying? Even the *Universe* will one day have to allow that it is because religion is being *found out*. A religion found out will acquire something stronger than a new church to bolster it up again.

The same paper makes another pathetic admission. "Only 18 Catholics," it says, "are in the House of Commons against about 80 in the days of Redmond." The reason given is that "Catholic candidates are not welcomed by the political parties; they are not amenable." That is not exactly the reason. The real cause is simply that Catholics will do nothing without the Church—right or wrong. A reform does not exist unless the Church says it is a reform. Science, art, literature, history, drama, must all bow to what a priest—that is, the Church—says. Everything must have the *imprimatur*

of a bishop or a cardinal. What a man's constituents want—and they are the people who elect him as their representative—is utterly beside the question. A Roman Catholic has to think all the time, is the Church with this particular question or not? And he acts accordingly. The fewer we have of this kind of "democratic" representatives the better.

But while religion is "decaying" here among intelligent people, the Church has some great successes to its credit in Africa. In the past 12 months the White Fathers have baptized 194,006 children and adults. We would like to bet that these new Christians were never told of the immense decline of religion all over Europe. No hint will ever be given to them that many "whites" ridicule the superstition and credulity taught by the "Fathers." Our consolation is that if the converted blacks are ever taught to read, they will find out for themselves. They will not always be hypnotized by the numbo-jumbo of Catholic priests.

Italy this year abolished the Christmas tree as Pagan because she is a Christian country. The Russians abolished it as being Christian, and Russia is anti-Christian. We, in England, imported it early in the nineteenth century, from Germany—it was unknown here before. Holly and mistletoe, both quite Pagan, used to be our special Christmas symbols. Altogether it looks like a precious mix-up. Personally, we think the question should be settled by the kiddies. Nothing seems to delight them more than a Christmas tree full of presents. Perhaps it's the presents which bring the joy.

Christians are hard put to it to explain how it happens that the majority of us manage to be decent people without reading foolish credulity to inspire wise morality. It was the rule for many centuries (before the days of newspapers) to deny the possibility of separating the two. To-day we are reduced to hearing such bald, hesitating malice as illustrated in a sermon by the Rev. W. Lax, in Wesley's Chapel recently. Mr. Lax wants people to believe that "Atheism robs life of all its wonder," while "Agnosticism allowed man's ignorance to overcome his moral faith." Unfortunately for Mr. Lax, all the facts of history and experience prove that a belief in any religion has often over-riden a man's moral actions. It is no small tribute to the Freethought position that a belief in morality has often been the Freethinker's inspiration to scepticism.

We are glad that at Pontypridd, South Wales, the Rev. M. Thomas has been sensible enough to understand that Prayer and Preaching will never again draw large congregations together. He has wisely encouraged using his Church for ordinary Dramas to be played to crowds of workers and unemployed. "Drama Week" has proved a success, and Pastor Thomas says "the time has come for the churches to substitute something for the enervating 'Thou Shalt Not' of the past." Yes, but who said "Thou Shalt Not?" He can hardly claim that God has changed, just because Mr. Thomas is more enlightened than was Moses. Mr. Thomas makes himself a trifle ridiculous by saying, as reported in *The Amateur Theatre*, that "the ladies who served on the Drama Committee had been doing God's work." We hope they were doing far better than that.

The *Sunday Chronicle* recalls the "daring" play of Edgar Middleton, called "Potiphar's Wife." The Censor cut out some quotations of Bible texts, but as he does not appear to have objected to the story itself the play was a success, the whole theatre being "sold out" the first night. One newspaper described the play as consisting of "one lurid scene, to say nothing of Jeanne de Casalis's pyjamas." It is difficult to understand the character of critics who can be "shocked" by a mildly "naughty" incident in a book which they constantly pretend to regard as divine, and in which there are some real "hair-raising" audacities of speech and story.

The vast public who are being educated to an unquestioned belief in astrology by those great organs of public

opinion, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express*, and similar papers, will be gratified to learn the *Mail's* pet astrologer's predictions for 1936. The League of Nations is, he tells us, "astrologically unlucky" its ranks "will suffer still further desertions." Both Italy and the Duce "will emerge from the present struggle with much of their ambition satisfied"—though the stars do not show "that they will ever conquer Abyssinia."

All this from "stellar conjunctions" is most fascinating, but there is, naturally, a great deal more. The planet Jupiter will have a "humanizing influence on the people of great Britain." Jupiter and Uranus combined are going to see the advance "of all forms of transport." Uranus alone going through Taurus "portends the finding of rich mineral deposits." Unfortunately the "malefic planets" are going to give the "individual horoscopes of our leaders" a rotten time; and this may cause an upheaval in 1936. Naturally, India is likely to have an earthquake, and Japan's star (which ever that is) "is in the ascendant." Germany will carry on until 1937, when "the stars may move to fatal positions," for that happy and tolerant country. But when "Jupiter enters Capricorn," you can almost say good-bye to the League! And this drivel is believed in by millions of people!

The Earl of Lytton has written a record of his son, the late Lord Knebworth; and many of the letters published for the first time, show the boy's preoccupation with religion. He "goes on at a great length about the inadequacy of religion to meet man's needs," points out one critic who quotes him: "The arguments for Atheism are so strong, I can hardly resist them; and yet I won't fall. I go on vaguely saying, 'I don't know, but I believe; and in my bones I feel that it is weakness, and really only ignorance.'" It is a pity the young man did not inquire further into "the arguments for Atheism"—he might have found them invulnerable. Lord Knebworth later toyed with the idea of joining the Roman Catholic Church so that he could never have really known the Atheistic argument. We know of none who have mastered it have ever gone back.

The Dean of Durham gives a quite impartial testimony to the power of prayer. Dr. Alington says that he heard King George testify that in the days of his "great weakness," he felt that he was being held up by the prayers of his people. We cannot say what "feelings" the King had during his illness, but we do know that he had the help of a number of the most skilled nurses and also well-known doctors, and that he publicly thanked them for his cure. Nor should we have any doubt that if he had been compelled to choose between the prayers and the doctors which he would have dispensed with.

We saw at a Cinema, the other day, a picture representing the care taken of the famous "Quads." These four babies are washed and fed by experienced nurses, with nothing allowed in the shape of expense to stand in the way. Hundreds of pounds are being spent on rearing them. There is, we believe, nothing more unusual at the moment in four at a birth—that is it is not more unusual than it was. But it has been made a newspaper stunt, and a feather-headed public "falls" for this as it persuades itself that it is "thrilled" by the wedding of a Prince or the birth of a royal baby.

We have no objection whatever to every possible care being taken of quads, or triplets, or twins, or units. But what we should like to know is the ground on which it is more important to keep the four children of one woman alive than it is to rear four babies, each one with a separate mother? Hundreds of pounds weekly, it is announced is being spent on the Quads. It takes a continuous campaign to induce the Government and the public to pay adequate attention to the provision of proper food and care for those babies who are unfortunate enough to come into the world singly. And if it is a case of twins, well, then the provision for two often leads to inadequacy for both.

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOZE.

EDITORIAL

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

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

E. A. McDONALD (South Africa).—We regret very much to hear of the death of our old friend Captain John Latham. He was a very gallant gentleman, in the best sense of that much abused term, fearless in his opinions and in their expression. We heard from him occasionally after he left this country for South Africa.

R. DODDS AND J. RYDER.—Many thanks for address of a likely new reader, paper being sent.

For Advertising and Distributing the *Freethinker*.—W. Parry, 2s. 3d.; Cardiff Branch N.S.S., 10s. 6d.

A. H. MILLWARD.—Thanks for congratulations. We are as careful of our health as we can be, but the work must be done.

H. L.—Mr. Cohen will be lecturing in London towards the end of February. Due announcement of time and place will appear in the *Freethinker*.

S. LINGARD.—We do not try to satisfy the demand for another life, because we do not believe that any such thing exists. What exists is a desire to live, which is a very different thing. The difference between the existence of a "feeling" and an explanation of its nature are very different, and often contradictory things.

H. EDWARDS.—Of course there is no mention in *Arms and the Clergy*, of the number of laymen—Christian and other—who sang the praises of war from 1914 to 1918. But the book in question merely claims to show how the clergy during those testing years, not merely backed-up the war, but proved themselves to be in the front rank of those who sang the praises of war as a school of character. It is the only compilation of its kind with regard to the "Great War."

G. TOWNSEND (Leicester).—The parson's case appears to be a very common one, but it is worth noting. Sorry to hear you are unwell. Best wishes for a speedy recovery.

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

The offices of the National Secular Society and the Secular Society Limited, are now at 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Telephone: Central 1367.

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

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

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

Sugar Plums

The Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society is now getting very near—January 25. Applications for tickets, 8s. each, that are delayed until the last moment give a great deal of extra trouble that could be avoided by writing earlier. The Dinner this year will, we feel certain, be quite as successful as usual, and we hear that rather more than the usual number of visitors from the provinces are likely to be present. There will be the usual first-class entertainment, good speeches and an excellent meal. Tickets may be obtained from either the General Secretary or from the *Freethinker* office. There will also be arrangements for those who prefer a vegetarian diet. It is particularly advisable that those who are vegetarians should write early.

We find that one or two of our readers have somewhat misunderstood the drift of our comments on Mr. Morrison's championship of Sabbatarianism during one of

the L.C.C. meetings. In saying that Mr. Morrison's opposition to Sunday performances was a piece of "vote-catching in view of the municipal elections," we are reminded that Mr. Morrison's own candidature does not come off until March. But if readers will turn to the original article in which we dealt with Mr. Morrison, they will see that our remarks referred to the municipal elections of November, and not to the forthcoming L.C.C. elections.

From the *Shetland Times* of December 21:—

I think that I have mentioned Mr. Chapman Cohen here before. At the moment all that I need to say is that he is noted for a clear, outspoken style, and for a mastery of the logical implications of any argument. His latest work is a controversial pamphlet, entitled *Humanity and War* (Pioneer Press, 3d.), which is one of the clearest statements of all the issues which the world is facing to-day. Is the League of Nations to be transformed into a really active factor in world politics, or is it to fade into oblivion? Is peace to be sought by piling up armaments, or shall we try to get some kind of international agreement (however faulty) to try to limit the extent of the nations' arms? Is the world to pursue a peaceful path, or are we already on the slippery slope which leads infallibly to another war? If such questions as these are in your mind (and they must be in many peoples' minds at the present time) read this little pamphlet. You may not agree with all that it says, but you will agree that Mr. Cohen has trenchantly expressed what a large number of his fellow-countrymen are thinking. And you will be grateful to him for so expressing himself. Sometimes we are told that the age of the pamphleteer is long past, but I do not think that this can be truly said whilst there are such valiant warriors as Mr. Cohen still left in the field.

Our esteemed contributor, Mr. C. Clayton Dove, sends us a cheque for 19s. 6d., to cover cost of distributing copies of Mr. Cohen's *Humanity and War*. We are only too pleased to act as requested.

Mr. G. Whitehead will be in Glasgow to-day (January 12), and will speak in the McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, at 7 p.m., on "The Case for Atheism." The Glasgow Secular Society has the arrangements in hand, and judging from recent experiences a full house should again assemble. Mr. Whitehead is well known in Glasgow, and has many friends in that area. On Tuesday, January 21, Mr. Whitehead is holding a debate with Mr. A. M. Ludovici, in Woodside Hall, Glasgow, on "Is Birth Control an Evil?" Tickets 1s. and 1s. 6d. each.

The Birmingham Branch N.S.S. announces a Whist Drive and Dance to be held in the Shakespeare Rooms, Edmund Street, on Saturday, January 18, at 7.30 p.m. There will be mystery and novelty prizes. Tickets are 1s. 3d. each, and there will be refreshments at popular prices. A social side to branch activity is very helpful, and it is hoped that the local saints will make a point of attending with as many friends as possible.

Unfortunately there has been a slight break in the lectures arranged by the West Ham and District Branch, in the Labour Rooms, 70 Grange Park Road, Leyton, E.10. However, these will be resumed as will be seen in the "Lecture Notice Column"—on Sunday, January 19. The first series has been quite successful, and has excited interest in "new" districts. Besides new members, visitors have come from other districts. In particular, friends from Grays have inquired as to the possibilities of lectures there. The Branch Secretaries, Mr. and Mrs. F. G. Warner—who work strenuously for the Branch—are in correspondence about it. There are many Free-thinkers in Grays, Tilbury, Dagenham and adjoining districts; and any who are willing to help might write to the Secretary at 83a Dawlish Road, Leyton, London E.10. At least two West Ham members are willing "to do their bit," by speaking at meetings there, either indoors or out. Thursday, February 6 is the date of the Branch's Annual Meeting for Balance Sheet, Election of Officers, etc.; and it is hoped there will be a good attendance of members. The past year has been a successful one.

The Evolution of Mankind

PRIMITIVE peoples regard the lower animals as similar in character to themselves. With the widely-spread Totemic communities this concept of relationship, however distant, is universal. But with the coming of civilization lofty, if not arrogant notions concerning man's superiority over the beasts that perish were cherished. To later Judaism, this changed attitude is in some measure traceable, while the later Christian Church ever emphasized the pronounced distinction of the possessor of an undying soul from a mere brute whose death ends all.

This belief in man's supremacy in mind, soul and character proved a formidable obstacle to the reception of Darwin's doctrine of man's ascent from inferior animal forms. Even now, with Old and New World fundamentalists alike, the suggestion of humanity's kinship with apes or monkeys is shunned with fear and disgust.

During Darwin's lifetime evidences of man's relationship with simian organisms convinced most leading zoologists of its truth. In more recent decades the evidences have multiplied. That man or some near relative existed in Tertiary times is shown by the coliths—those stones of the dawn—originally unearthed in England by Reid Moir. Doubts were confidently cast on their authenticity, but most anthropologists now view them as the products of artificial agency. Moreover, Professor Klaatsch, when engaged in Australia in ethnological research discovered that the native tribes were using, in the words of Dr. Bernard Bavink, "primitive flint tools, not only exactly like coliths, but in some cases even more primitive. Klaatsch was also able to study on the spot the simple technique used by the natives to produce these tools. All that he saw led him and many other investigators to the conviction that coliths must after all be regarded as artificial products, and hence as a proof of the existence of Tertiary man."

No positive proof of man's presence in the Tertiary, apart from his rude implements is thus far established. But the bony remains of early humanity already known are so highly developed that it is obvious that these are the outcome of a long anterior course of development.

Perhaps the most famous fossil is *Pithecanthropus erectus* discovered in Java in 1891. This was regarded by Haeckel and other experts as the link which connected man and ape. Later, the finding of human remains in China set all reasonable doubts at rest, for the Pekin fossils, which closely resemble the Java remains, prove the semi-humanity of their original owners. The fragments discovered near Pekin, which include teeth, parts of the lower jaw and occiput, suggest those of the chimpanzee, although they represent the remains of several prehistoric savages.

Sir Arthur Keith has conducted a painstaking study of the Java fragments, and that eminent anatomist assures us that it is "human in stature, human in gait, human in all its parts, save its brain." Another high authority, however, while conceding that the Java fossil skull "possesses characters exactly intermediate between those of a large anthropoid ape like the chimpanzee and a primitive man," still views the fossil as "a large specialized form which belongs to a twig of the anthropoid branch independent of the true human branch." This judgment is that of Professor Boule, but in any case, these human or semi-human remains were found in company with those of a score of other mammals, all of which are extinct, whose age is estimated as certainly no less than 250,000 years.

The discovery of human remains at Piltdown in Sussex in 1913, aroused a spirited controversy, and doubts were expressed as to whether the separated parts found belonged to one individual. In 1917, however, a second discovery in which the separate fragments of the original find were found together, confirmed the opinion of those who claimed the remains as those of one extinct form. Keith refers the Piltdown skull, which possessed a large brain, to Pliocene times, which carries us back to the Tertiary epoch.

The African cranium of Broken Hill, in Rhodesia, was not fossilated, and its teeth are very remarkable in showing signs of caries, a disease previously undetected in any prehistoric skull. At least two skeletons were discovered, but their age is undetermined, but if they date back 125,000 years, which appears a reasonable estimate, men were in being in Africa when savage humanity existed both in Germany and England. Dr. Woodward has carefully studied the Rhodesian skull which possesses extremely large eye-sockets suggesting those of a gorilla, but the teeth are unmistakably human in every respect.

In 1924 another African discovery occurred at Taung in Bechuanaland, and the remains are apparently those of a child six years old. The fossil was easily reconstructed, and while the eye-sockets resemble those of a gorilla the skull seems more akin to that of a chimpanzee, while other features are distinctly human. It is a curious medley of ape and man.

The strange Heidelberg lower jaw came to light in a sand pit at Mauer near that city. It is strikingly ape-like in its massiveness and approaches that of a chimpanzee, but here again the jaw is furnished with completely human teeth. Its age is placed at 200,000 years, but it may be more ancient still.

The Neanderthal race lived at a later time, and well-preserved parts of fifteen representatives of this type are already known. From a considerable number of excavations conducted in several countries (Southern England, Sweden, Belgium, France and Germany) much valuable information has been gathered. This extinct race dwelt in Europe when that Continent was partly glaciated and it was contemporary with the reindeer and the mammoth, and it hunted these wild animals for food. Neanderthal artifacts were of stone and, until the coliths were discovered, were the most primitive known.

The rude Neanderthal race reigned without a rival until the Aurignacian Era of the Old Stone Age, when a new race arrived which was soon succeeded by other newcomers, including the fine Cro-Magnon men who betrayed many close affinities to modern mankind. So far as is at present known, Neanderthal and Heidelberg man were not related, nor does the former display any resemblance to the men of Aurignac. The position of the Cro-Magnon stocks is also very conjectural.

The culture of Neanderthal man is better known. Bavink surmises that: "The youth of Le Moustier, dug up by Hauser, had undoubtedly been buried ceremoniously. It is difficult to resist the further conclusion that human beings practising such customs must already have had a kind of belief in an existence after death, such as is general among primitive savages in our day. The fact that they knew the use of tools, although in a very primitive form, is proved by the discovery of flints. Even fire seems already to have been known to them, as appears from part of the bones of animals eaten being burned."

Long ages since, as we have seen, several varieties of man existed most of which have become extinct. One wonders whether these various types arose from

a common ancestry, or if some of them branched off independently from the simian trunk. Darwin and Haeckel alike assumed a common ancestry for all the races that now inhabit the globe. But there seems weight in Gustave Le Bon's suggestion that although these great naturalists had completely outgrown the current religious creed they, nevertheless, remained under the influence, however unconsciously, of the Mosaic story of the creation in their assumption of the unity of mankind. Le Bon himself favoured the theory that the black, white and yellow races sprang from separate sources.

Still, in any circumstance, we may assent without reserve to the conclusion of Sir Arthur Keith that: "The drama of man's evolution was not staged in a favoured meadow for a single performance; it is still proceeding in our slums, country cottages, and palaces, just as it did in the days when man's only roof was the wide dome of the sky."

There is little question that an active and intelligent animal, destined to develop into modern man arose from ape-like ancestors, and that it diverged from the parent stock at a time when several other species of mammals were undergoing important advances in the size and structure of the brain.

Continental elevation on a considerable scale was then in operation, and doubtless contributed to man's advance. The arboreal habitat of his ancestors shrank in density and volume, and the Homonids descended from the trees of the diminished forests, gained an upright posture with far freer use of the hands, arms and legs, and these advantages, reinforced with an increased power of vision materially helped to smooth the path for the appearance of modern humanity.

T. F. PALMER.

Science and the Press

WE have said so much about the character of the popular press, with its passions for sensationalism, the space given to matters of no importance to anyone with enough brains to soar above the preaching of a sucking curate, that we are pleased to see a protest, in *Chemistry and Industry*, against this nation-wide exploitation of the ignorant and the thoughtless. In its issue for December 20, that journal has an article on "Science and the Popular Press," from which we reprint here:—

The *Evening Standard* is now publishing eight articles on "scientific" problems contributed by well-known men, some of whom are scientific. They include such topics as "What is Death?" "Is there an After-Life?" "Can we Create Life?" "Is there Life on the Planets?" and "What is my Conscience?" Now we do not blame the *Evening Standard* for publishing such articles by such men as the distinguished authors of them, nor do we blame the authors for writing the articles. There is no reason to blame anybody, but it is surprising that in this country, after seventy years of highly-organized education including a great deal of scientific education, there should be in the popular press so little reference to the important scientific discoveries made by chemists, physicists, and biologists and so much reference to those meta-physical chimeras engendered by the fermentation of the dregs of theology and psychology. There are several reasons for this state of things. It requires a little effort, not a great one, but more than the average young man or girl is willing to take, to appreciate the recent advances in agriculture, in the manufacture of metals, hydrogenation of coal, and such matters. It requires very little intellect and very little effort to

read speculations about "Life" or "After-Life." Science is founded on facts and new facts are found out every day; the speculations about "Life," "After-Life," "Conscience," and "The Universe" are based upon very few facts and a great mass of beliefs and prejudices. Macaulay nearly a hundred years ago pointed this out in language that is worth repeating: "There are branches of knowledge with respect to which the law of the human mind is progress. In mathematics, when once a proposition has been demonstrated, it is never afterwards contested. Every fresh story is as solid a basis for a new superstructure as the original foundation was. Here, therefore, there is a constant addition to the stock of truth. In the inductive sciences again, the law is progress. Every day furnishes new facts, and thus brings theory nearer and nearer to perfection. There is no chance that, either in the purely demonstrative, or in the purely experimental sciences, the world will ever go back or ever remain stationary." And in the same Essay of Macaulay (*Ranke's History*) we find also this passage: "It is a mistake to imagine that subtle speculations touching the Divine attributes, the origin of evil, the necessity of human actions, the foundation of moral obligation, imply any high degree of intellectual culture. Such speculations, on the contrary, are in a peculiar manner the delight of intelligent children and of half-civilized men. The number of boys is not small, who, at fourteen, have thought enough on these questions to be fully entitled to the praise which Voltaire gives to Zadig. "Il en savait ce qu'on en a su dans tous les âges; c'est-à-dire, fort peu de chose." We wish that the popular press would do rather more for those of us who are not merely intelligent children or half-civilized men. We cannot expect very generous treatment for we are a small minority of the readers of the popular press and there do exist a few daily papers that pay attention to real science. But if this country is to maintain its present proud position science must be fostered and must advance. Not only must scientific people improve their knowledge; those who are unscientific or very little scientific should be encouraged to take an interest in the advances of science so that the general public may gradually learn a little of our modern civilization. We think that the popular press in this country could do rather more than it does to stir up interest in genuine scientific discoveries. The sensational no doubt has its place in the economy of nature and the pages of the periodical, but is of very little value to the community.

The Meanderings of a Sceptic

It may be objected by the perfect nomad that my title is inapt, since my remarks betray some sense of arrangement. I would retort that even the wandering river in the flat and fertile plain has a beginning and a general direction, be they never so vague.

The beginnings of scepticism rise in strange and diverse lands. They may possibly have originated as a slow reaction against the uninspiring lives of many professing Christians and active worshippers—a most fertile source of sorrow and perplexity. Or perhaps the chief tributary may have been a disgust with the formalism of Church worship, with the august pomp and ceremony so proper, honourable and laudatory in the eyes of one half of humanity, so gaudy, base and futile to their brothers. It may be that the embryo river was thrown violently from a sheltered path where it observed the just opinions of the thoughtful, patiently voiced but ineffectually championed, over on to the hard rocks of the forceful and active worldly-wise, and that this had much

to do with the direction of its later course. And shall it be denied that horror of the smug ignorance of the masses, untouched by years of futile national education, or of the placid superficiality of the rich, had any influence upon the unprotected rivulet; and would it be surprising that the widespread neglect of scenes of exquisite beauty, which that strange land possesses in profusion, should have caused that infant rivulet to toss more wildly in its upland bed? Suffice it to observe that in its vague beginnings a torrent protested against the valley tract carefully laid out before it, tore through a narrow rocky gulf on one side, and, causing the sweet verdure of a prepared path to lose its freshness, fade and wilt, passed the rest of its days in ceaseless, restless deviations over a vast, and, some say, barren plain, a plain nevertheless where, if direction often does seem meaningless, yet the air is free and the horizon wide and unobscured.

On one of the first of its innumerable windings the river encountered the revered problem of the existence of a just God, omnipotent and omniscient, simultaneously with the existence of Evil. Evil was said to be necessary to test mankind, and when it was objected that the use of evil as a test was immoral, voices observed that only by struggling with and overcoming evil of all kinds could man perfect himself. The waters thereupon impudently rolled up a pebble, probably brought down from the torrential tract, which had written upon it "With God all things are possible." The river in pensive mood suggested that, if this were true, then the struggle with evil was not necessary, and God might have considered more moral methods whereby man might evolve. "Again," it observed, "Nature, which appears to be identified with God, is demonstrably cruel in her methods, she does not protect and succour every flower in the field or bird in the air." But then stentorian voices on both banks boomed out that God knows best His own purposes, and so threateningly did these words resound over the waters that the river glided along swiftly and in silence for fear of being dammed.

The river could not, however, but recollect a passage from a book which had been thrown into its waters half a century previously, and which it had memorized before the constantly flowing waters reduced to pulp the fleeting images of a heretic. The passage ran something like this, "You can make me live in your world, O God, but you cannot make me admire it."* The river continued to turn this sentence over in the mud at the bottom, which constituted its brain, and concluded that it had a system of morals and a fairly firm idea of right and wrong, and that the words moral and immoral only had a significance in relation to this system. According to this point of view the action of an all-powerful Creator in allowing evil to exist or in planting evil tendencies in man's heart, was an immoral action, and the immorality did not seem at all justified by the fact that man might subsequently triumph over evil, or obtain happiness in another world in the future. These things, of course, man believed in, and he was obliged to accept the existence of evil and the necessary struggle to obliterate it. But the Creator remained immoral, which thought caused the waters of the river to become decidedly turbid.

Presently, passing by an old fisherman on the bank, the river saw that he was speaking aloud, though no companion was near. Drawing closer it was struck by his grave countenance, and more so by the fact that he was addressing a fish that he had caught and

was holding it by both hands whilst it writhed. "Know, Oh fish, that thou art in my hands. Scorn me not with thy base mortality, neither call me murderer. I stocked the river with thee and thy brothers and now I reclaim thee. Neither canst thou condemn me through thy puny logic. I, as thy Creator, created both thy logic and thy morals, hence I am neither immoral nor moral, logical nor illogical, for I am not confined within these bounds. I am supra-moral even as I am omniscient." The fish assumed an astonished expression, and shortly expired, but the river now began to flow more easily in its bed.

Obviously an all-powerful, all-knowing Creator must have made not merely the material things of life but also have caused to come into being all spiritual phenomena. He must therefore be above all such ideas and stand in a totally different relation to them from human beings, though able to appreciate the peculiar position of mankind. We could, of course, continue to judge the Creator according to a system or morals which he has propounded for us, but such a judgment seems to lose much of its force if it be realized that the Creator must have invented the very ideas of good and evil, which did not exist before this creative act. Such a being was incomprehensible to the river, which, however, had become more settled in its course, so that in a short while the turbidity disappeared and the light from the heavens shone clearly through the waters to the unfathomable muddy depths.

Even so, the course of the river did not yet run smooth, for when it had made the Creator into an utterly incomprehensible Being, when it had denied to him every attribute common to human beings or capable of being visualized by them, on the ground that these very qualities were the creations of God, not parts of Him, and could be destroyed by Him as easily as they had been created, then the conception of God became meaningless. How could God be conceived as loving, when he invented the emotion called love? How could he be a sympathetic creator when he had commanded sympathy to come into being and could likewise command it to disintegrate, leaving, not aversion, but a blank. A human being can destroy love by developing hate, or can encourage love by controlling hateful impulses, but he cannot, as his Creator can, obliterate the whole scale of love and hate to leave a void where was emotion. The argument proceeded remorselessly and showed a God which had created even the idea of extent and sequence, who existed before these limitations came to pass, and who would continue to exist after they had ceased to be. Nay, further, He had created the very idea of existence, so that one could not speak of God as continuing to exist. God could not logically be called either He or She, for He had invented sex, neither was He neutral or sexless, for this implied that He lacked those qualities which characterize sex. He was not inanimate, for He possessed all those powers, the possession of which we call life, whilst He was not animate for He was not bound by those limitations which equally characterize life. He must be above all attributes that a human mind can conceive, for otherwise He is limited by them, and is not omnipotent. Hence, the loving Christian God becomes an inscrutable First Cause, about whom nothing may be said. This stands as the originator of existence and nothing more. As such it is meaningless and useless to mankind, of no significance in the world in which he finds himself, and a mere symbol acknowledging his necessary ignorance of the ultimate origins of all things.

ALFRED E. BEVAN.

(To be concluded)

* Winwood Reade: *The Martyrdom of Man*.

Freethought Anniversaries

8th JANUARY

THOMAS AITKENHEAD.—Towards the close of 1696, this 18 years old boy was arrested and charged with Blasphemy. Said to have been of some capacity he had—in the presence of companions of his own years, including a decoy—ridiculed the Incarnation, decried the Trinity, and called the Old Testament, Ezra's fables. He was denied legal aid and not allowed to give evidence on his own behalf. Bullied and browbeaten he broke down and pleaded penitence. In spite of this, the witch-burning bigots of the General Assembly of the Scots Kirk got their way, an illegal sentence was passed, and Thomas Aitkenhead was, on January 8, 1697—hanged.

To-day there is in the *Encyclopedia Biblica* an elaborate article on Ezra. The true and the false are examined, forgery is separated from fraud and naught of worth is left.

This teaching is far in advance of anything dreamed of in the seventeenth century, but it is the accepted teaching of the Higher Criticism, among the majority of the Scots Kirk clergy. These escape. Their predecessors "spoke and preached for cutting him off," and cut off he was.

11th JANUARY

On January 11, 1850, George William Foote was born at Plymouth, Devonshire. Eighteen years later he came to London. "I had plenty of health and very little religion." Earlier in life he had been converted, and seems to have been a Sunday School teacher, but the process of re-conversion had started before he left Plymouth. He had scarcely any knowledge of either Atheism or Secularism, although in his early years an Atheist had been pointed out to him! "Naturally I regarded him as a terrible monster." But in a year or two we find him teaching in the Secular School at the Hall of Science, playing a leading part in the Y.M. Secular Association, and writing occasionally for the *National Reformer*. During this time he was being introduced to the leaders of the Secular movement and to lecturing work. In 1876 with Mr. G. J. Holyoake, he started the *Secularist*, but in two months was in sole possession. Then in 1879 he was editing the *Liberal*.

There never was a propitious time for starting or running Freethought periodicals, and these years seem to have been among the worst. Yet this was the time—May, 1881—when Mr. Foote, with rare audacity, started yet another, the *Freethinker*. And he kept it going till his death 34 years later. In many of these years his principal associate was J. M. Wheeler, and later, Chapman Cohen, who succeeded him as editor. They have had the assistance of the militant Freethinkers, and the loyal support of the rank and file. And they have made the *Freethinker* the oldest Freethought paper in Europe, and one of the strongest bulwarks of individual and collective freedom in existence anywhere.

At this time Foote was engaged all over Britain in lecturing and debating. He had a fine platform manner with a flair for the dramatic element in any situation, while his apt quotations from Shakespeare and other favourite classics were given with a fineness of elocution seldom met with. There was no pose, none of the vulgarity or coarseness attributed to Freethought advocates by their Christian opponents; but worst of all in the eyes of the Christian was his sense of humour. To joke about Jehovah is as bad as the sin against the Holy Ghost. This did not deter Foote, and his publication of the Comic Bible Pictures must have given the enemy a bad jolt. At once the bigots got busy, a prosecution was set agoing in which it was sought to involve Mr. Bradlaugh. So the notorious Sir Hardinge Giffard was set to work. Get that Bradlaugh convicted and he is finished with Parliament. Mr. Foote has left a record how Mr. Bradlaugh fought Giffard in one court after another until he won out, not guilty. Mr. Foote and his manager were also acquitted, but they had already been

convicted on another count and viciously sentenced. The combination of Roman Catholic Judge North and Anti-Popish Barrister Giffard was too strong. At the sentence Mr. Foote said: "Thank you, my Lord, the sentence is worthy of your creed." When he was released, a year later, one of his first actions was to deliver, in person, at the Judge's residence, a copy of the current *Freethinker*.

In 1890, Mr. Bradlaugh resigned his post as President of the N.S.S., and Mr. Foote was unanimously elected his successor. In handing over the Chairman's hammer Mr. Bradlaugh said: "I give it to you, George William Foote, and I trust that when it becomes your painful duty to resign, as I do now, the progress that has been made in the cause while you have held it, will be such as to compensate for the pain." He was President 25 years, and there was progress.

About 1898, Mr. Foote and the leaders of the fighting side of the British Freethinkers founded the Secular Society, Limited. It has had its imitators, there are always such. Its inception was due to Mr. Foote and to none other; he was the sole begetter. In one of his trials he had heard Lord Chief Justice Coleridge rule that if the decencies of controversy are observed, even the most fundamental of religious beliefs may be attacked; and he, G. W. Foote, argued that the objects of Secularism as set forth could not be attacked. This led up to the Bowman Case, in which it was upheld—eight Judges to one—that Atheism is perfectly legal, and funds may be bequeathed for its promotion. It is not intended to re-tell the story of the Bowman Case, of the fight which ended a centuries-old wrong and established a new day. The Society's solicitor said that Mr. Foote's advice had been taken from the start, and the congratulations should go to him. But before the House of Lords gave its final decision in May, 1917, Mr. Foote was dead. The satisfaction of knowing that his Fight for Right had been a winning fight was never his, but he knew from the questions and arguments that legal opinions were changing too. He died October 17, 1915. The closing stages of the fight were in the hands of Mr. Cohen. The Blasphemy Laws remain. Who will be the next victim we know not. When it will come we know not. But the victim will not be rich, he—or she—will be poor, one of the common lot. A successful agitation for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws would be the finest memorial we could have, not only to George William Foote, but to all those others, known and unknown, who have given of their best for the Best of Causes.

AUTOLYCTS.

Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

FREEMASONRY AND ATHEISM

SIR,—The Constitutions and Charges of Freemasonry declare that, "a Mason will never be a stupid Atheist." Therefore, the question arises, if a Mason become an avowed Atheist, are the Oaths, etc., of his initiation still binding, as a seceder from his Lodge, and can he remain a Brother Mason?

Literary work in hand involves this problem, and as I have not been "made," in the masonic meaning, perhaps your readers will give authentic details, in strict confidence, to assist me with a chapter entitled: "Once a Mason, always a Mason."

W. A. VAUGHAN.

SCOTLAND AND DISESTABLISHMENT

SIR,—On re-reading Mr. Alan Handsacre's excellent book *The Revenues of Religion*, I find in the Introductory the statement. "The Protestant Reformed Religion, established by law in this Country (England, I presume) is the only State Church in the British Commonwealth of Nations, in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, etc., State Establishment of Religion does not exist."

I knew the Church was disestablished in Wales and

Ireland, but I have still to find when it was disestablished in Scotland. The Rev. James Barr, Leader of the Presbyterian Church (continuing) has a book which deals with the Church of Scotland, established in much the same manner as A. Handsacre in his *Revenues of Religion*, a book which I am sorry is not more widely known amongst Freethinkers. I quote one passage:—

"In May, 1845, Alex. Murray Dunlop, said: 'That he stood as an opponent of the Endowment of Maynooth, but he went further, he began to see, as most of us come to see some day, that Endowment of Roman Catholicism is but an effect and counter-balance that inevitably comes sooner or later in church or in school as a past recompense or retribution for the Endowment of Protestantism.'"

This gentleman, saw in 1845, what the vast population fail to see in 1935, that they all hang together, as you Sir, have often remarked, for fear they hang separately.

The whole sordid story is a curious commentary on the mentality of a people who are credited with intelligence, intelligent maybe, but honest! However, I hope for a more militant attitude from the N.S.S. to this question, and also that Mr. A. Handsacre will rectify his error in future reprints.

JAMES MCKENNA.

Obituary

CAPTAIN JOHN LATHAM

THERE died in Johannesburg, South Africa, on December 7, 1935, one of the most devoted, scholarly, and unselfish workers for Freethought that the writer has ever known. Born in New Zealand 66 years ago, John Latham has led a varied life, from fruit grower in Australia, mining on the Rand "in the earlies," trading and prospecting on the veld, captaining troops in France during the Great War, to peddling brushware for a bare living in his last years. Like so many sensitive and gifted natures in the ruthless scramble for "success" of the contemporary scene he "failed" in the current degraded acceptance of the word. Despite this, as the Editor of this Journal, who knew and respected him, will confirm, he was always amongst the first with his contribution towards the Cause which meant so much to him. With his pen and his voice he was ever on the alert for the encroachment of the enemies of reason and sanity; courteous, dignified, but frank, refusing to temporize with superstition even when masquerading in the guise of "science" and fashionable "compromise." The Lodges and Jeanees got as short shrift from his keen intelligence as the black hosts of the orthodox. At one time he attended a Congress of International Freethinkers held at Rome, and he recognized and deplored the sinister change that has come over the postwar world making such meetings impossible, not only in Italy, but elsewhere on the Continent of Europe. But he never lost courage, and his interest in the affairs of the mind, books, the heroism and stupidity of his fellows, and the beauty and terror of Nature, was steadfast to the end, which came quickly after a few days' illness from pneumonia.

Like the grand old pagan that he was, he directed that his body be given to the local Medical School for dissection and research; but a regulation made this impossible, so a few of us gathered round his graveside while a short address was delivered by Mr. J. D. Stevens, a fellow "saint" and friend of many years standing. And so we saw the last of John Latham, gentleman, scholar and adventurer, who lives on in many a heart made better by his presence.—E.A.McD.

The prophet Balaam would never have seen the angel if he had not had an Ass for a guide. How many of the "truths" of theology would be seen by the people without having the clergy to guide them?

"Opinions," Chapman Cohen.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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LONDON

OUTDOOR

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

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 3.30, Sunday, Messrs. Gee, Wood, Bryant and Tuson. Current Freethinkers on sale.

INDOOR

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Gauden Hotel, Gauden Road, Clapham, S.W.4): 7.30, A Member of the League of Nations' Union—"The League of Nations."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, Joseph McCabe—"Professor Dewey's Creed for Everyman."

STUDY CIRCLE (68 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): 8.0, Monday, January 13, Mr. P. Goldman—"The Sexual Impulse."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.): 7.30, J. P. Gilmour—"Why Religion?"

COUNTRY

INDOOR

BIRKENHEAD (Wirral) BRANCH N.S.S. (Beechcroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane, Birkenhead): 7.0, J. V. Shortt, (President Liverpool Branch N.S.S.)—"Freethought and 'Free'-thought."

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Tavern Hotel, Godwin Street, Bradford): 7.15, Mr. H. Searle—"Ice Ages."

BURNLEY (St. James' Hall): 7.30, Monday, January 13, Mr. J. Clayton—"The Ethics of Birth-Control."

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"What Is Civilization?"

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, George Whitehead—"The Case for Atheism."

HETTON (Club Hall): 8.0, Wednesday, January 15, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Prof. H. Levy—"Science and Religion."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Cooper's Hall, 12 Shaw Street, Liverpool): 7.0, W. A. Atkinson (Manchester)—"The Meaning and Purpose of Freethought."

MIDDLESBROUGH (Labour Hall, Grange Street): 7.0, Sunday, January 12, Mr. J. T. Brighton—"Education in Error."

PRESTON BRANCH N.S.S. (Garth Arms, Avenham Street, Preston): 7.30, An Important Branch Meeting.

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