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

Views and Opinions

Atheism and Progress

LOOKING over a batch of cuttings from some American papers I came across a statement that arrested my attention, not because it was new in substance, but rather because it was very familiar, and one met it with a smile of recognition. A Rev. John Mackay, of San Marcos University, Lima, addressing a Congress of Christian workers, brought them the "glad tidings" that the wave of Atheism which had been sweeping over South America was receding, and public men were searching hungrily for religious fellowship. Now that is a statement we are all familiar with. We all know the wave of Atheism that is always receding, and never appeared to do anything but recede. In fact, it is almost impossible to discover when on earth it advanced. The curious thing is that although the wave of Atheism has receded there are decidedly more avowed Atheists in the world at the moment than at any other period of human history. And beyond the number of avowed Atheists there is the much larger number who for various reasons keep their Atheism to themselves, or disguise it under some non-committal name such as Rationalism, or Agnosticism, or who profess to have no definite opinion on the matter. But if we take Atheism in its only proper sense, that of being without belief in a God, it would not be at all difficult to prove that that frame of mind is decidedly growing. The mere fact of the indifference shown by so many to all questions of religion is in itself a proof. When a wave of religion sweeps over a country there is not any great difficulty in discerning its presence. And when one sees large numbers of men in all walks of life who deliberately declare either that they take no interest in religious questions, or define their religion in terms of a non-religious sociology, one may fairly assume the existence of a large and growing volume of definite disbelief. Of course, the disbelief is not always openly avowed. But that is a question of

moral courage, and of facing those inconveniences which the religious world is still able—and ready—to inflict upon its opponents.

* * *

The Cloak of Religion

On the other hand I do not question that there is some truth in the statement that a certain number of public men in South America are searching for some form of religion—for other people. That, too, is not an unfamiliar spectacle. It is not at all an uncommon thing for politicians and others who for any reason wish to stand well with the general public, to appeal to religious feelings and lavishly to use religious phrases. They know that the reactions to these are fairly prompt and general with the unthinking portion of the public. Our own publicists will offer plenty of illustrations in support of this. And there is, in addition, the historic part played by the Christian religion in the politics of Western Europe. Whether the Government happened to be good or bad, it was always found a profitable game to row in with organized religion. Religion has served not only as a dope for the people who were ruled, but often enough as dope for the people who ruled. On the one hand it kept the under dog quiet, and on the other hand, the display of religion served to fortify the upper one by supplying an ethical justification for whatever he happened to be doing. To what extent religion attracts an undesirable type of character, or the extent to which it demoralizes certain aspects of character once it has taken a hold on a man, is a subject for discussion, but the fact that under cover of religion men have always found it easy to gratify their meaner passions, does not admit of very great question. Moreover, from the time of Constantine onward, it has always been found profitable by politicians and publicists of a certain type to humour and flatter organized religious bodies. The development of political nonconformity during the nineteenth century supplies a striking illustration of this, and the coquetting of the Labour and Socialist leaders with Church and Chapel—but particularly with Chapel, is only part of the same policy. To enlist the support of religious bodies by playing to their religious prejudices is one of the commonest of political dodges. One can, therefore, credit the statement that in South America a certain number of public men are playing to the religious gallery. Whether the people as a whole will benefit by the performance is quite another question.

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A Plain Position

Atheism has nothing of this kind of thing about it to commend it. Right or wrong the Atheistic point of view may be, but it does not admit of being used as a dope. In the first place it obviously invites people to think, and thinking is the greatest of all solvents of worn-out institutions. It encourages a

critical frame of mind in the very act of establishing itself. It cannot set up any institution as "sacred" or beyond removal or improvement. If it does not of necessity involve Government by discussion, it does place Government under discussion, and against open discussion no sham can stand for long. And its test of worth is immediate and obvious. It cannot hold out a promise of some other world to remedy the sufferings in this one; nor can it divert energy from social ends into religious channels. Frauds, follies, and wrongs may exist with Atheism as with everything else, but there is no extra cloak by which they may be hidden. It can, in the nature of the case have no other test of the wisdom of actions than their effects upon human happiness here. And while even that may not prevent the emergence of wrongs, it supplies a plain reason for their removal. So I am not surprised at certain public men trying to find a religion for the people. If they had the same concern to see people happy as they have to see them religious the world might be much better than it is.

* * *

Atheism a Growth

But what is meant by the wave of Atheism receding? In the first place I have never heard of a wave of Atheism overtaking a people. People who use that phrase are always religious folk, and they have in mind the waves of religious frenzy which do actually occur. But it is simply impossible for Atheism to sweep over a people in waves. It is not an epidemic but the outcome of a reasoned process. Whether the reasoning is sound or unsound Atheism is that. And it follows from the mental history of man that while belief in God is something that civilized man inherits, Atheism represents a stage in his intellectual development. It is something he achieves as a consequence of the growth of knowledge. The overwhelming majority of Atheists were, as a matter of actual fact, once ardent theists. They have passed through the stage in which the genuine theist still is. And once a man has reached that stage what chance is there of his reverting to the frame of mind out of which he has grown? How is it possible for him to divest his mind of the knowledge he has acquired of the history of the God-idea? If he knows, as every Atheist does know, that the idea of God began in the mistaken conjectures of imperfectly instructed mankind, by what means can he divest his mind of that knowledge and get back to the simple beliefs of primitive mankind? It is, of course, possible for him never to reach an advanced position. But once having reached it, it is not easy to see how he can recede from it. Knowledge is not something that one can put off at will. The man who once understands on what a false basis the belief in God rests cannot believe at will that it rests on a basis of logic or of fact. It is easy for a Methodist to be overcome by Roman Catholicism, or for a member of one religion to join another and then return to his original family. In these cases we are dealing with related forms of the same mental state, and the transition from one to the other may be determined by all sorts of adventitious circumstances. But the change from want of knowledge to knowledge concerning a particular phenomenon is an altogether different thing. One may never reach the point of becoming an Atheist, but once having become one, nothing short of mental decay can ever reduce him to the religious frame of mind.

* * *

The Growth of Atheism

The process of Atheism does not proceed by means of "waves," neither does it recede in "waves." It may develop more rapidly at one period than at another, and that is characteristic of all phases of

development. And an arrest of civilization such as followed the victory of Christianity may mean that its progress is very slow indeed for a considerable period. But at its best, intellectual development is a tolerably slow affair, and that is a fact which every reformer should take well to heart. The Freethinker faces a world which for thousands of generations has been sunk in superstition, a world in which every one of our institutions is still saturated with it. When he talks to this world he is using a language which to most of those he addresses is almost a foreign tongue. He has also against him all the power that threatened interests can wield. And yet with all these advantages on the side of religion, and with all these disadvantages to face, the Atheistic attitude of mind becomes more general. If its presence is not confessed in so many words, it is none the less there. In the world of positive science the idea of God is to-day practically non-existent. In other branches of knowledge it is rapidly weakening. The clergy lament that whole masses of the people are "living as if God did not exist." In social matters even those who profess to believe in religion more often than not justify their work by purely secular tests, and resent the introduction of religion as being altogether out of place. The habit of thinking about the world and about man in terms of natural science grows stronger year by year. All these are so many illustrations of the growth of the Atheistic type of mind, and disguise it how we may, it is that. And once established it is not the mumbling of mouldering religious formulæ that can destroy it. It can be destroyed only by the destruction of civilization itself.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

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The Tabooed Scriptures

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

"Even if forty millions say a foolish thing, although a sovereign folly, it is none the less folly."—G. Cattin.

NONE of the four Gospels professes to give an exhaustive account of the life of the alleged founder of the Christian Religion, and the Gospel attributed to John concludes with the modest statement:—

There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."

It must be admitted that tradition does make very startling demands even on the childlike faith which is nurtured on the fairy-tales of the Gospels. Few more instructive volumes could be placed in the hands of anyone interested in the Christian Religion than the tabooed Scriptures known as the "Apocryphal Gospels"; of which very few Christians have much knowledge. Even the "Old Testament Apocrypha" has been pushed into the background by astute ecclesiastics, and when Queen Victoria placed upon the tomb of the Prince Consort, a quotation from that neglected volume *Book of Wisdom*, she fluttered the doves of Orthodoxy. Yet down to the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the "Old Testament Apocrypha" was an integral portion of "God's Word," and no Christian Bible was considered complete without it. Since that far-off time the Apocrypha has almost disappeared from the public eye, and is mainly read by a few students who are interested in the origin and history of the Christian Religion.

The far more interesting "Apocryphal Gospels"

are even more unknown to the ordinary reader. A generation ago an edition was issued by Reeves and Turner, but it was a cumbersome volume; and a more scholarly version, edited by a Mr. Cowper, was too expensive for the general reader. Some day, perhaps, an enterprising publisher will place a handy edition of these tabooed Gospels upon the book market at a moderate price. For no other volume throws such a searchlight upon Christian origins. In these unknown accounts of the alleged founder of the Christian Religion one finds the accepted gospel legend in the making, the studies, as it were, of the completed painting of the "Old, Old Story." And the very fact of this interesting volume being taboo to the religious world is all the more reason why it should appear in an easily accessible form.

Much of the matter in these tabooed "Apocryphal Gospels" covers perfectly unfamiliar ground, and is calculated to make the ordinary innocent believer rub his eyes. For example, in the "First Gospel of the Infancy," it is stated that Young Jesus performed a miracle in his seventh year, astonishing his boyish playmates by making clay figures of asses, oxen, and birds, which walked, flew, ate and drank, as he commanded them. This most veracious account concludes:—

When at length the boys went away and related these things to their parents, their fathers said to them: "Take heed, children, for the future, of his company, for he is a sorcerer; shun and avoid him, and from henceforth never play with him."

A variation of this quaint story appears in the "Second Gospel of the Infancy," piously attributed to the authorship of "Saint Thomas." In this version the young Christ is said to have been five years of age, and the miracle is said to have happened to twelve clay sparrows, who, on the clapping of his hands, came to life and flew away.

A similar vein of oriental legend and nonsense runs through all these "Apocryphal Gospels," and the carefully cultivated belief of Christians must needs feel shocked at such crude revelations. The known Gospel legends are poured into their ears from their earliest years, and the "Old, Old Story" has a familiar ring even when half believed. But the unblushing mendacity of these "Apocryphal Gospels," being in a totally unfamiliar setting, should make the most bigoted believer pause and think furiously.

And one thing must be evident to every honest reader of these "Apocryphal Gospels." The Christian Religion itself is based upon similar nonsense, for Christianity is based upon miracles. In the last analysis, it is on the truth or falsehood of miracles that the very personality of Jesus Christ must stand or fall. According to the four Gospels, it was by miracles that he attested his divine mission. It was by miracles that he is said to have won his first followers. It was by miracles that he proclaimed himself, not a mere evangelist, but the actual "Son of God," and without greedily credulous belief in these alleged wondrous happenings, the Christian Religion would have long since died out, and gone the way of its forgotten Pagan predecessors. It is not a creed of "love" and "brotherhood" which has fascinated the ignorant and half-civilized millions through two thousand years, and caused them to carry on their backs a greedy and tyrannous priesthood, whose coffers have always been filled with gold and treasure; and who, to this day still extort tithes, church rents, and coal royalties.

According to the Christian Bible, Jesus claimed that he was "God," and his proofs of his divinity were that he multiplied loaves and fishes, changed water into wine, healed sick persons, and actually restored the dead to life. The whole question is reduced to one of plain blunt facts. If we can believe

that Christ was really born of an actual virgin, that he performed the most prodigious and wonderful acts, that he died and was buried, and afterwards left the earth like an aeroplane, then we need not hesitate to accept the priestly pretensions for the Christian Religion. If, on the other hand, we believe that the proofs for these monstrous miracles are totally inadequate, or that natural laws are never broken, no twaddle of "love" or "brotherhood," or sentimentalism, will make believable a religious system which has flamed the fear of hell over the world for twenty centuries, and robbed men and women of countless millions of money in the process.

The most important Christian body, the Roman Catholic Church, recognizes this quite fully, and actually affirms that its own very questionable miracles are a direct continuation of those said to be wrought by Christ, his disciples, and the saints. They tell the world that the so-called "cures" at Lourdes, and elsewhere, and the swindling liquefaction of the blood of Saint Januarius at Naples, are precisely such as those mentioned in the Christian Bible, and that the apparition of the Virgin to children at La Salette is as genuine as the miracles in Judæa. The priests of the Greek Church take the same logical position, and actually contend that the theatrical and profitable revelation of the Holy Fire at Jerusalem every year is simply the last link in a great chain that extends back to the time of Christ and the twelve disciples. It will be seen that the two greatest and most powerful Churches in Christendom leave mankind chained within the prison of Superstition. It is the life-purpose of Freethinkers to break those fetters, and set Humanity free from the clutches of a greedy set of impostors who have battened upon innocent believers these two thousand years. To dispossess such priests of their pernicious power would mean writing a new and happier page in the history of humanity.

MIMNERMUS.

The Witch Mania

VI.

THERE were two kinds of meetings for witches—one called the Sabbath, the other, the Eibat. The Eibat seems to have been a particular Assembly, not for the general public at all, but called for a special purpose or purposes. Some of the meetings, whether Sabbaths or Eibats used to take place always at the same place; others varied very much. The Devil indicated the time and place. Miss Murray, in her *Witch Cult in Western Europe*, quotes Danæus, writing in 1575:—

He appointeth where they shall meete, and at what houre of the day or of the night; wherein they have no sureness nor certaintie. For these meetings are not weekly, nor monthly, nor yeerely, but how often it shall seem good to this their maister. And many times himself warneth them to meete, sometimes hee apoynteth others to warne them in his steade. But when he doth it himself he appeareth unto them in likeness of a man.

Of course, the assemblies were not all merriment, feasting and dancing. All sorts of magical business took place. There seems to have been an extensive manufacture of charms and curses. Attempts to wreck ships by magic, or release prisoners, plotting to kill obnoxious authorities, making wax images of enemies in order to kill them were all part of the night's business. Whether any good or harm resulted is a matter of opinion. If there had been a serious drought and the assembly asked the Devil to make it rain—and it really rained, was the Devil re-

sponsible? Most Christians believed he was—perhaps, at the same time, believing that the resulting crops would turn out badly.

Kissing the Devil seems to have been also part of the ceremonies. He used to say where he wanted to be kissed; and there are some curious prints showing the witches evidently enjoying this part of the proceedings. The witches made offerings to him and according to the Frenchman Boquet (1589), who seems to have believed anything and everything, "ils lui offrent des chandelles et le baisent aux parties honteuses de derriere." At all events, the kissing was evidently well liked by Satan as it appears to have been done in the same way all over Europe. Some of the witches asserted that he had a tail, often an enormous one. It was probably not a difficult matter for the Devil to furnish himself with such an appendage.

As for the dancing, it was obviously not exactly of the kind which takes place in our own halls. It was probably much like the dancing which English visitors can see, if they pay heavily enough for it, in some of the Eastern towns like Cairo. Many of the dances were quite indecent, as can be expected. The dancers often were disguised as animals. The so-called "ring" dance seems to have been one in which the Devil took part in the centre of a group of dancers. Of course, there was some kind of music—generally played on a pipe, or on a "Jew's" harp. Violins, trumpets and tambourines were also requisitioned, and when accompanied by lusty singing, provided all the music that was necessary.

Naturally, all the proceedings were lighted up by candles, though perhaps they were part of the ritual and not exclusively used for lighting. Often the Sabbath took place on Candlemas Day, on February 2, which, though it is used by Roman Catholics for celebrating the Purification of the Virgin Mary, was evidently a pagan festival. It was certainly known at the time of the Romans. At all events, the Devil carried a candle on his head, and all the witches lighted theirs at its flame.

That there were also "religious" ceremonies is fairly evident from the confessions extracted from the witches. Once a priest, always a priest, is maintained by the Church, which accounts for what is known as Black Mass; for only a priest can perform the magical ceremonies at the sacred altars, black or white. Some of the old books on Witchcraft give detailed accounts of the religious ceremonies, mostly performed in mockery of those of the "true" Church. The sacrifice of the Mass was often done in the name of Satan or Lucifer. There were wafers and "the drink was sometimes blood, sometimes black moss-water." In one of the most famous cases in France, that of La Voisin, it was the Abbé Guibourg who more than once celebrated mass dressed in full church vestments, "over the body of a woman and with the blood of a child, sacrificed for the occasion, in the chalice. The woman, who served at the altar for these masses, was always nude, and was the person for whose benefit the ceremony was performed." Almost the same kind of "diabolical sacrament" is described as taking place in New England of Salem, by Cotton Mathers.

It is difficult to read the solemn accounts of these things by the old writers without smiling. They certainly believed that infernal scenes took place with the Devil as the chief instigator. The various "sacrifices" all really happened as described by the women. Nothing seems to have been allowed for inevitable exaggeration—or for the fact that, if men and women are tortured to confess, most of them will be ready to confess anything. Miss Murray describes four sacrifices which all, of course, took place at some of the

Sabbaths, but which were, in my own opinion, more the exception than the rule.

The blood sacrifice, that is, the one in which the offering was the witch's own blood, possibly took place more often than the others. The women generally had to sign a contract, and it was done with their blood as the writing fluid. Sometimes the Devil was supposed to suck the blood from the wound. Another sacrifice was that of an animal, generally a fowl. Quite possibly this was cooked afterwards for the meal. Cats and dogs were also sacrificed.

As for new-born children, there seems to have been very little of this—though it would not be surprising if the accounts were in part true. Exposure of the poor little unfortunates was rampant all over Europe. Those were the days before artificial contraceptives and the only way of keeping down the size of families or of getting rid of unwanted illegitimate babies was by killing them, for that is what it amounted to. Miss Murray says that "in Scotland it was firmly believed that sacrifices of children took place in all classes of society." There is a great deal of uncertainty as to what was done with the bodies by the witches; but, it seems to me that some of the reasons given by the Christian inquisitors—that the bodies were used to make certain ointments or even drinks or meat pies—are a little far-fetched. If these things are true, they were only rarely done.

Animals were certainly sacrificed—but they were just as certainly eaten. Some of the accounts say that the animal was burnt, and with the ashes "on faisoit languir ou mourir des personnes, ou autres animaux"—that is, they were used to make people and animals pine away or die.

Whether the witch cult was a survival of some old pagan religion or practice, as Miss Murray maintains, is by no means proven; though there can be no doubt some of the rites were certainly survivals of old fertility cults. She claims that Joan of Arc, burnt as a witch, and her associates, "belonged to the ancient religion, not to the Christian." And, of course, it must not be forgotten that it was for witchcraft that Joan was burnt. Her judges were, I think, nearly all, or quite all Christian bishops—mostly French, by the way, and not English—steeped in gross superstition, it is true; still they judged her according to the light of the day and not according to ours. It would prove interesting if the theory could be confirmed. Still, it is a fact that her famous soldier-companion, Gilles de Rais, some years after her death, was tried for witchcraft and condemned also to be burnt. I believe that a recent French work has tried to rehabilitate him—pointing out that charges made in those days by the superstitious peasants and listened to with sympathy by equally credulous Christian bishops as judges, could never be upheld in any court where evidence, real evidence, that is, was a *sine quâ non*, and not superstitious fear.

While then, it is quite possible, some of the rites belonged to old and perhaps forgotten fertility cults, handed down through the ages, there seems to me much better evidence that most of the Sabbaths were merely orgies at which men and women of certain classes let themselves go. They were encouraged by various "devils"—the descriptions of these gentry leave little doubt that they were simply wandering friars, priests, or other men on the look-out for sexual satisfaction, or a good meal, or even money. Some were certainly astrological or medical quacks clever enough to prey upon the ignorant and the credulous, particularly upon those who believed—as so many do even at this day—in all sorts of charms and amulets and divination of all kinds.

I will deal with other curious aspects of the witchmania in further articles.

H. CUTNER.

Things Worth Knowing*

— — —
XXIX.

LIVING ON LIES

CERTAIN obscurantists find a practical proof of the utility of superstitions in the almost animal anxiety displayed in guarding religious and ethical premisses from enquiry and criticism. Bad as are the quarrels of men of science and of artists, these are confined to the interested specialists, and the rest of mankind do not tear each other to pieces about Post-impressionism or the transmission of acquired characteristics. It is only about religious and moral questions (patriotism in its various modern aberrations partaking of both) that we find, in the field of mere belief and opinion, such universal tigris—and—young fear and ferocity. The result of all this, jubilates our obscurantists, and is proof also of a *Racial instinct* defending these matters. Possibly; but in that case how does your racial instinct set to work? And ought it not to have resulted in the survival of fetichism and taboo, or at least the disappearance of the races who first got rid of such useful superstitions.

Instead of *Racial Instinct*, so plentifully invoked (like every word compounded of those great Xs Race and Races) nowadays, it is not possible that the persistence of superstitious attitudes may be explained by a mere individual instinct of which daily life furnishes many examples; the instinct to avoid taking trouble? And is not such conservatism born of lazy convenience of ready-made rules and averages; of the hurried and wearied reluctance to verify one's compass; of the discomfort, sometimes the paralysing discomfort, of readjusting opinions and conduct; in fact born of inertness such as makes the poor sluggard suffer agonies at being waked, and turn desperately on to the other ear?

Perhaps the obscurantist might answer that inertness, fatigue, sluggishness, are themselves Racial advantages, and due to the great Racial Instinct. Shall we conclude, that if people had been more alacrous and elastic, the human race would have ceased to have offspring, been gobbled up by Paleolithic monsters or (what obscurantists like less) that its finer varieties, for instance, the noble Aryan, would have philosophised themselves into non-resistance against the Negro, or even into intermarriage with the Semites? This leads to the dilemma, either that the superior sub-race was not superior in intelligence and adaptive power, or, that too much superiority may be a bad thing; with the manifest corollary that a dash of the Negro, a preponderance of the Semite, might have done the noble Aryan a world of good.

The proposition that prejudices may have been necessary for keeping up the standard or strain of superiority, would thus require eking out by a counter proposition that prejudices must be broken through to diminish that unpractical superiority. And both propositions would require the supplement of a remarkably *terre a terre* statement, namely; prejudices are sometimes mischievous. Or, put in more dignified language, superstitions may be the result of Racial Instinct, but if that be the case, then another result of Racial Instinct is the rebellious criticism of that self-same superstition.

So perhaps it is wiser, let alone more modest, not to let Racial Instinct, that vast smoky genius out of his

allegorical bottle. The persons, however, who insist upon having dealings with Racial Instinct, do not regard that huge personification as at all able to take care of himself, at least, not nowadays. In any case they . . . seem always ready to lend him a hand in keeping up old superstitions or fabricating new ones.

On this undeniable fact that half our beliefs result from mere personal or collective passion, habit, and convenience, latter-day Obscurantism finds its modest claim to believe useful and consoling things which do not happen to impose themselves on our reason as true. But beyond this point it passes immediately to the right of teaching such desirable things which we ourselves cannot believe, but other persons luckily still can. If you and I see no good reason why virtue and vice should get their deserts in Heaven and Hell, it does not very often happen that the advantageous results of such a doctrine enable us to believe it. But 'tis a fact of daily occurrence that these advantageous results induce us to teach eternal punishment to those who do not already disbelieve in it; or at all events to oppose ourselves to do anything that should awaken such disbelief. And from the right to teach or abet of what we cannot ourselves believe, Obscurantism goes one step further, to the duty of doing so. . . .

In this propaganda of Vital Lies, lies the chief danger and odium of such applied Pragmatism; in this zeal for the moral edification of others, rather than in any individual paltering with truths, of which every one of us already unsuspectingly carries about as much as is possible. Moreover, besides the intellectual objection to such Obscurantism there is a moral, that is to say, a social one. Deceiving a man is tampering with his property, and jeopardizing his freedom. It is taking an undue advantage, accepting the principle of fair play and not playing fair. For we cannot teach what we know to be a myth or a fallacy, without first making those whom we teach believe in the good faith we are breaking.

Vital Lies, by VERNON LEE,
Vol. II., pp. 142-8.

The Birthplace of Megalithic Monuments

THE meaning of the many megalithic monuments in the British Isles has long interested lovers of archæology. That they are far more ancient than was formerly supposed is generally acknowledged. The long accepted theory that they were the independent products of the native inhabitants has been seriously challenged by the school led by Dr. Perry and Prof. Elliot Smith, and even if the problem still awaits final solution, it must be conceded that several weighty considerations lend support to the view that the megalithic structures of Western Europe were the handiwork of immigrant settlers who arrived from the Mediterranean region some thousands of years ago.

The architects of these monuments apparently settled in mining areas in Britain and Ireland. And, while the later Anglo-Saxon invaders made the river valleys of Eastern England their dwelling place, the earlier immigrants adopted as their habitations the upland areas of the South and West.

The culture of these early settlers seems to have been similar to that of contemporary megalithic peoples in France, Scandinavia and Spain, with whom they were subsequently in close touch. In England during the Neolithic or New Stone Age, the dead were deposited in long barrows, while in the succeed-

* 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.

ing Bronze Period round barrows were used. It is noteworthy that although the defunct were buried in the long, as well as the earlier round barrows; at a later time the remains of the dead were cremated. Many years ago Canon Greenwell pointed out that representatives of a long-headed race are usually found in long barrows, while the later round barrows frequently contain the remains of both long and round-headed people. This obviously indicated the intrusion of an alien stock among the dark-complexioned long-headed population.

Perry considered the once imposing stone circle at Avebury in Wiltshire as of higher antiquity than our greatest surviving megalithic monument at Stonehenge. In the remote long-barrow time Perry pictures Avebury as the proud capital city of England. Shamefully enough, its splendid stone structures have been destroyed by what was little better than insensate Vandalism. Only a century or so since, Aubrey the antiquary asserted that the Avebury avenue and circle as far transcended Stonehenge as a cathedral doth a parish church. Now a mere fragment of its former grandeur remains.

Near Avebury stands Silbury Hill, perhaps the largest tumulus in Europe. This immense mound is five and a half acres in extent, and reaches a height of 130 feet. Then there is the neighbouring West Kennet barrow measuring upwards of 100 yards in length which must in its palmy days have been a very impressive mausoleum indeed.

We may safely assume that the now relatively thinly-inhabited counties of Wilts and Dorset were in past ages the homes of considerable communities. The vast extent of the ancient burial mounds furnishes conclusive evidence of this. Hutton and other expert authorities are agreed that the population was once great. The excellent maps of the district prepared by Hippisley Cox, show a very large network of pathways connecting together an array of earth structures, frequently of enormous dimensions, which in all likelihood were constructed by the long or round barrow race. Moreover, these ancient trackways not only cover the country near Avebury, but ramify in every direction throughout our island.

In his stimulating essay, *The First Civilization of England*, Dr. Perry states that: "Avebury is in that part of England which certainly was most thickly populated in those early times. The counties of Wilts and Dorset are full of remains of builders of barrows both long and round; and there are many earthworks on the summits of the hills, all linked up in one vast network." Although massive stone erections exist elsewhere, and Arbor Low in Derbyshire is a splendid stone circle, the Avebury memorials exceeded all others in magnitude and splendour. Avebury was apparently the capital of the country, and the theatre of its leading religious and civic ceremonial. "Indeed," inquires Perry, "what other interpretation can be given to this mighty monument, and its attendant Silbury? To that spot must have come the important people from all quarters to take part in ceremonial and other gatherings. Otherwise its immense size cannot be explained. In later times, when Avebury was a thing of the past, Stonehenge was built to serve, in like manner, as the ceremonial centre, perhaps of the country as a whole."

Little information is afforded of the civilization of these ancient people from objects placed in their graves. That they were competent miners is clear. Chalk deposits containing flint of which most of their tools and implements were composed were numerous in Wilts and Dorset. There were excellent flint mines in Sussex and Norfolk, and there existed various other working centres elsewhere. The use of flint implements was general, and not only was flint

utilized as well as chert, but they obtained granite, basalt and other durable substances from the rocks and these materials were converted into serviceable appliances. Also, the later burial places contained gold, copper, tin, and amber, as well as the alloy, bronze, while the presence of beads, jet and other objects indicates trade or barter with foreign countries in addition to their own.

Almost without exception, the presence of stone circles or other megalithic structures coincides with the proximity of highly-prized products. The circles of Salop and Derby are near lead mines, which seem to have been worked both for home consumption and for export.

The earlier barrow builders were apparently members of the Mediterranean race, and the distribution of their stone monuments in Britain, France and Spain supports the theory that all these peoples were engaged in the production of objects valued for their economic or imaginary importance.

The type of sepulchre customary in England was also in use in Iberia and Gaul and may have reached more northern latitudes via Portugal. This certainly appears a more reasonable conclusion than that of independent evolution. It has been contended that the building of stone sepulchres such as passage dolmens began in Portugal, and from that country spread to other lands. Perry and his disciples, however, proclaim the view that the art of the megalithic mason first arose in Eastern surroundings. Rock-cut tombs are admittedly unknown apart from megalithic masonry. Nor are these sepulchres confined to Western Europe, but are common to Italy, Cyprus, Crete and Egypt, although the relatively rude passage dolmens of Western Europe are absent in these last-named lands.

This discrepancy has been cited to prove that there is no real connexion between the two types of tomb. Perry, on the other hand, argues that the custom of cutting tombs from the rocks, together with the high appreciation of amethysts and other precious stones, was introduced indirectly, if not directly, from the East. But after its settlement in foreign climes the original craftsmanship, and probably the mystical sentiments began to decline. Perhaps with a lessening in skill and an increasing scarcity of necessary tools for cutting tombs from the hard rock, simpler methods were adopted to satisfy sepulchral requirements. So the inventors of the passage-tomb dug a trench which "they lined or covered with slabs of stone. Finally, they constructed a tomb above ground and heaped a mound over it."

It is also worthy of note that several earlier archaeologists were deeply impressed by the marked resemblances between the megalithic monuments of Eastern and Western lands, and inclined to trace their genesis to the Eastern Mediterranean area.

Tombs riven from the rocks existed in Egypt in 2,000 B.C., and then spread to Crete and Western Europe. Now, bronze was in early use both in Crete and Egypt, and as bronze is an alloy of tin and copper, and the former metal was absent in both places they were compelled to obtain their tin from abroad. The Cretans and the Egyptians were seafaring peoples, and doubtless sent their trading vessels on long voyages. Presumably they imported their tin from the Golden West, from those countries that were rich in tin and copper, and where gold was still to be found. In Northern Spain the stone monuments are nearly all to be found in districts where metals abounded. In Britain and elsewhere the facts are the same, and it is fairly obvious that Egyptian and Cretan merchant-adventurers anticipated the later exploits of the Phœnicians and other trading peoples.

According to Dr. Perry the first civilization of Eng-

land was introduced through Egyptian influence at the time of the 12th and 18th dynasties. The land of the Nile was then actively interested in foreign affairs, while the Cretan civilization was flourishing once more. Egypt greatly influenced Crete, as Sir Arthur Evans testifies. Consequently, the suggestion that Portugal, a comparatively rude country, could then have been the seat of a superior culture that spread to many other lands, must be dismissed. Once more, in the Bronze Age barrows of Southern England, beads of blue paste have been discovered, whose curious design is strikingly suggestive of those long in use in ancient Egypt.

T. F. PALMER.

Acid Drops

We are glad to see that strong opposition is being offered to that part of the new Education Bill which deals with the raising of the school age up to 15 years of age. The Government of the very honest Mr. Baldwin, while promising one thing arranges for another. For the school leaving age may be lowered provided a local committee is satisfied that the employment to which the child is sent is "beneficial." Obviously, this must mean relatively beneficial, and one would dearly like to know what employment can be more "beneficial" to a child than that extra year of education? We recall that when this country was engaged in the most infamous form of child-murder known to man—that which existed in the early days of the factory system—this was also held to be beneficial to the child. If such a rule became the law it means that the welfare of a child depends upon whether it is born this or that side of a municipal boundary line.

Should this rule become law it will mean that the less thoughtful, the poorest, and the greediest, will decide that to leave school will be beneficial, the better-off, the more generous parents will keep their children in school for the extra year. The Government of Mr. Baldwin will visit the sins of the parents on the children to at least the first generation. We suggest the more logical, certainly the more straightforward plan of preventing the children of the "lower classes" attending school at all.

But one aspect of this permissive negation of the school-leaving age, has not, so far as we know been noted. For years, as we have from time to time pointed out, the aim of the Board of Education has been to lower the standard of education. The order has gone forth that there must be provided a "cultural background" for education and for the civil service. But the elementary schools have done their work well—too well—and in competitive examinations have shown a larger proportion of successes than has been achieved by those from private and "public" schools. Attempts to meet this difficulty have been made by way of attempts to lower the "pass" standard. This does not shut out the products of the elementary school, but it gives those of the private and "public" schools a better chance. Now if remaining at school till 15 is permissive and not compulsory, this will at least restrict the "upper" class children being flooded out by the products of the elementary school; for it is certain that in the majority of cases advantage will not be taken of the extra year. There are now many parents who unwillingly keep their children at school till 14. These are not likely to avail themselves of the extra year.

We are glad to note that the well known architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens, has once again proved that cleanliness is better than godliness. It seems that he recently discovered, as so many people did before him, that "holy water" in churches, "like post-office ink, had a way of acquiring a slimy consistency"—that "it was suffered to lie in the fonts until it became holy mud," as a re-

ligious writer puts it. Sir Edwin "hit upon the excellent idea of installing running holy water" in the new Roman Catholic Cathedral in Liverpool. Filth and piety always used to go together, and we often wondered how any sane person could imagine the sticky slime so repeatedly found in church fonts was actually "holy." There are plenty other channels for sanitation in the church.

The B.B.C. religious services are, of course, boring rubbish to a great many listeners, for they switch on some "sinful" foreign station whenever they can. To others, they are listened to very reverently; while there are still others who are, as a religious writer says, "puzzled about some of the services." "For instance," he asks, "is it reverent to keep on a service when people are talking and working in a room?" It may not be reverent, but perhaps the people who talk and work are as fed-up with the service as any "blatant" Atheist. The same writer also asks, "Is it right to listen to the prayers and make no effort to join in them?" Good Lord deliver us! How can anyone in his right mind join in some of the insane drivel which the B.B.C. religious censors have passed as prayers? Most, if not all, prayers are quite hopeless, but there are prayers and prayers.

The same writer asks, "Again, what about Benediction? A great many people who listen-in have no idea what it means, or what is happening, or in what way Benediction is unlike any other broadcast service. Do these people know what it means to kneel down?" Quite a number of devout people know perfectly well how to kneel to receive Benediction or grovel before some religious idol. That is all right in church or in the street. But it is often difficult to do so in a modern sitting-room packed with furniture and other knick-knacks. They have to be moved out of the way and the average "daily" hates to be given this extra work. Perhaps the Rev. Mr. Iremonger, the B.B.C. religious director, will one day indicate precisely when people should commence to kneel or grovel so that the room can be properly prepared. Our heart goes out to the pious who find it difficult to grovel before a wireless set.

All of us who possess that queer compendium of superstitions called the *Book of Common Prayer*, have altered our copies, and we shall be careful not to confuse the ever-present, all-knowing, Three-in-one, by mistakenly asking Him to bless William the Conqueror or Queen Anne. It was very thoughtful of the Archbishops to give to Him-who-knows-all a correct list of those whom He ought to bless. But, as a tiny tot of our acquaintance innocently asked, "Doesn't God read the *Times*?"

The Rev. Leslie Weatherhead has been explaining exactly what sort of process is meant by "Inspiration" of the Bible. He says, "there is a measure of inspiration in every book in the Bible." Yes, a measure, but apparently the "measure" is a very "short measure" in some books. For instance, in *Leviticus*, says this humorous theologian: "the pudding is stodgy and the plums a good way apart." We are inclined to add that in *Genesis* the "dates" have gone bad, that "The Song of Songs" is very fruity, that *Jonah* is fishy, that we cannot swallow *Daniel* any more than could the lions, and that some of the authors were bad eggs.

It is very amusing (occasionally) to read the many paraphrases which theologians suggest for terms they desire to "explain away." We read that Mr. W. H. Counsell, in his book, *My Notebook on St. John*, offers us a most curious alternative to the customary rendering of John ix. 35 ("Dost thou believe in the Son of Man?"). Mr. Counsell suggests instead: "Dost thou believe in the spirit of posterity." We shall soon be reckoned as "believers" ourselves if it is as simple as all that. We even sympathize with the author's plaintive lament: "To reduce the phrase (spirit of posterity) to a Messianic title reduces the stature of our Lord to a tribal totem."

Christians, especially professional Christians, have some peculiar ideas about citizen rights. We have often drawn attention to the privileges parsons claim at Brewster Sessions. The Rev. Mr. Carter, the leading light of the Methodist anti-beer movement, says "a minister's position is stronger than that of an ordinary resident," that is to say, that while the Magistrates refuse (quite properly) to allow ordinary citizens to air their views at the Licensing Sessions unless they live in the area under consideration, a paid Minister of any Church expects, and is often allowed to travel from one town to another and talk against the issue of any licence. Mr. Carter says that his "movement" represents five thousand Methodists.

Everybody knows how St. Francis (and other saints, we believe) talked with birds and fishes; and there are stories extant to show that these birds and fishes paid homage to "Our Lord" and "Our Lady." Fr. Grimshaw, of Mid-Africa, in a communication to one of the religious papers, says that, "three times last year bees occupied our vestment cupboard. We evicted them with fire and smoke; but one morning when we came to Holy Communion, we shut the tabernacle hastily; bees had gathered inside in a black mass. We cleared them out with hot water and paraffin." We protest that this was most unfair. Could anything be clearer than that the bees came in a crowd to worship and adore "Our Lord?" Had the story been reported by St. Francis, it would have meant that, anyway. We dislike this obviously growing scepticism even in out-of-the-way missionary stations.

The replies by a Catholic editor to his puzzled readers are always entertaining. Here is one:—

The evolution of man is not a "proved fact," but a hypothesis which as yet lacks proof. The Church tells us that we are to keep to the literal historical sense of the first chapters of Genesis so far as the peculiar creation of man, and the origin of the first woman from the first man are concerned. But the words used in these accounts may be to some extent, and indeed must be metaphorical.

We love the way in which the pious believer is told to "keep" to the "literal" historical sense of the first chapters in Genesis—though they may be, and "indeed must be" metaphorical. The question now to be answered is how a "metaphorical" account can be a literal "historical" one? Any Catholic priest will, however, answer that to Roman Catholicism this is quite easy.

Father Kosh, S.J., recently exposed "the flimsiness of the teachings of Alfred Rosenberg, the leading foe of Christianity in Germany"; so the famous Jesuit monthly, *Stimmen der Zeit*, in which the article appeared, has been promptly suppressed by the Nazis. Other Catholic papers have also been suppressed, and several priests have been gaoled for standing up against Nazi teachings. We hold no brief for either; but in the name of Freethought, we do protest against suppressing opinion, however bitterly we may be opposed to that opinion. All criticism has the right to be heard.

The *British Weekly*, in common with most religious journals, depends for its revenue on advertisements. Naturally, therefore, it is not likely to recommend anyone to depend on prayer rather than on advertising. A writer in that paper refers to the alleged "contrast between Muller's and Barnardo's Children's Homes; the former never advertises, the latter constantly does... we must remember that the fact that Muller's orphanages do not ask for money is publicly known, and is itself the best possible advertisement." What then becomes of prayers to God? Obviously all these pious pretenders are praying (by advertising), not to a God who never reads newspapers, but to wealthy men who do.

Dr. Albert Peel, Editor of the *Congregational Quarterly*, admits that "the churches are not winning new people. They are not touching the working-classes. . . . From purely economic reasons the present system must break down. . . . Many churches are unable to

point to a single individual they have won from the non-church-going community for years." We cannot find justification for the reasons Dr. Peel gives, but his facts cannot be gainsaid. The real reason is the last one we can hope to see admitted by clerics, but the fact which is apparent to everybody else is that the younger generation has ceased to regard religion as of any importance whatever.

A ridiculously inadequate biography of Dostoevsky, by David Larg, who is, in the *News-Chronicle*, described as "the well-known biographer," shows that great humanist as a "slight and stuttering figure, greyed and incorrigible asking his question, 'Is there a God?'" The "well-known biographer," writing for a public which has too much sentiment and too little knowledge, declares that Charles Darwin "quite unwittingly," "knocked over one of the ancient illusions of humanity." Of course, Darwin had not the intellectual advantages of Larg, or he would have known what he was about.

What was the "ancient illusion," Mr. Larg refers to? It was "not so much the Christian view of life that Darwin undermined, as the spiritual," which Mr. Larg's poor satire calls an "ancient illusion," as if Mr. Larg would be allowed in the *News-Chronicle* to call religion any kind of an "illusion." For Mr. Larg goes on to show that from this sarcastically called "illusion" comes all religion, all art, and the tremendous if not "absolute truth if there be one," that "man as seen by himself is and should be a creature of mystery." Mr. Larg is so befuddled himself that it is no wonder he glorifies illusion and praises self-deception.

The Rev. Herbert Farmer, M.A., writes in the *Christian World* about "Two Kinds of Religion." It is difficult to imagine anyone limiting their vision thus, except in the same way as one looks at a single hair and guesses that all the rest are like the one under observation. Mr. Farmer is afraid that while he himself holds the true and only complete religion, there are some good people who have something "that passes as religion and indeed is religion—so far as it goes—in these days." As if this polite but forcible jest were not enough to wither and scorch these heretics, Mr. Farmer tells them in St. Paul's words: "They walk in the vanity of their minds because of the blindness of their hearts."

The right answer to those who believe in prayer is given by the Rev. John Bevan, M.A., who well says, "It would be intolerable if those people who believed in God escaped suffering because of their belief, while the non-religious had to go through it to the bitterest dregs. What a bribe religion would then have to offer the world." Mr. Bevan would deserve a place in our "Sugar Plums," but he qualifies for position in "Acid Drops," by feebly falling back on the assumption that "By faith in the good God—the God of Love, we can make a contact with Him whereby His energy comes into our souls," But if God's "energy" is of any use or value, and we can only get it by "believing" or "Faith," we find it just as "intolerable" as "escaping suffering because of belief."

Dr. A. E. Garvie, as a pillar of the Nonconformist Party, makes an admission in the *Christian World*, which is worth recording. He will not please the churches which have always claimed that Christ made no mistakes, as indeed no God—incarnate or otherwise—could do. Dr. Garvie says plainly:—

If we are not to play fast and loose with the record of the New Testament—Jesus Himself did, as did the primitive community—anticipate His speedy Second Advent in power and glory, the general resurrection and the final judgment, and not an age-long history for which provision must be made.

We predict that Christians will continue to "play fast and loose," by pretending that the gospel of Christ is applicable to all periods of the world's history, and was brought into the world with that object in view by One who is "the same yesterday, to-day and for ever."

Jottings from a Sick Bed

I DON'T know who first used the expression "a sick bed," but whoever did so, it is quite wrong of the bed on which I am now lying, and on which I have been lying since January 29. Far from being sick, this bed is a very good one, one of the best in the hospital, to which the police ambulance, *sans choix*, carried me. It is a gross libel to call a bed such as this one "sick"; and one can only excuse it on the ground that it is an expression of that deeply-rooted animism which leads man to impute his own feelings to nature in general. But I do not like to slander, even by implication, so excellently built a bed as the one on which I am lying.

On January 29 I left home to meet my wife with the intention of proceeding to a cinema. That part of the programme materialized in due course. But within half an hour of entering the building I was taken with a severe headache and sickness that left me oblivious to everything. Two men very kindly and efficiently lifted me from my seat and carried me into the manager's room. I wondered what was going to happen, and there flashed through my mind a story told of the once well-known theatre-loving Father Dolling. One of the ladies of his congregation remonstrated with a "suppose you died there?" "Oh," replied Father Dolling, "I never thought of that; it wouldn't be at all a bad place to die in." "Seeing that death must come," it would not be at all a bad fate to pass out in the company of a Bergner or a Chaplin.

The manager of the Cinema, probably fearing to have a corpse on his hands, sent for the police, who phoned for an ambulance, and in spite of my request to be taken home, took me to a local hospital, where I still am. Had the police taken me home the delay in securing a doctor would probably have rendered his attentions unnecessary. I was suffering from a severe hæmorrhage from the stomach, and for a time my condition was very critical. My wife stayed at the hospital for two nights, and was with me a deal of the time. For myself, I experienced nothing but a great weakness. As is the case, I think, with most deaths, if the end had come then there would have been nothing but an easy, painless slipping away. My physical condition alternated between a damp coolness and hot flushes. Evidently there was a want of decision about my ultimate destination. For the time, at least, I declined either of the two implied.

For the hospital itself I have nothing but praise. The food is good and plentiful and curiously, I derive some satisfaction from watching the procession of trays, and the pleasure to be had from the consumption of the food. Except for a shortage of nurses, the hospital appears to be well-equipped, with a first-rate medical staff. My own doctor has a calm and confident air about him, an assurance of decision, and a sympathetic attention to patients that must be of great help to those in his care. The nursing staff is kindness personified. Through long hours—too long hours—the nurses continue cheerful, patient, attentive, efficient. My own recovery has been rapid, but I am sure that this is largely due to their attention. So far as they could replace "home" they have done so. These nurses show human nature at its best. Theirs is an onerous occupation that carries little in the shape of material reward; it is in the best sense of the word a vocation. The cool efficiency of a capable nurse is something to admire—and remember.

"What a piece of work is man," cries Hamlet, "how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty; in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel; in apprehension how like a god; the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals"; and yet, the loss of a pint of blood may reduce this cosmic marvel to a physically ineffective clod, and mentally, to a conglomeration of flickering, loosely co-ordinated reminiscences of the past, and "hag-drawn" fantasies of the present and future! What a blunder it was for ancient philosophy to endow the mind of man with the quality of indestructibility! There is actually nothing with which we are acquainted that is so closely connected, so intimately dependent upon definitely ascertainable conditions as is the "mind." Excess or deficiency of food or water, the inefficiency or over-efficiency of this or that gland, a blow on the head, a nervous shock, opium, hashish, a whiff of a gas, may alter or suspend the manifestation of mental qualities, a trauma may create two or more personalities in the same body. And increasing years may show us finally this "paragon of animals" slipping into a last insensibility, *sans sight*, *sans taste*, *sans hearing*, *sans* even the consciousness of its own approaching dissolution.

For several days I was not permitted to swallow a single drop of water. During that period I discovered the meaning of thirst. My tongue was like a ball of fur confined in a box of wool. My mouth seemed to be, not so much *dry*, as something with which moisture had no connexion. But I was allowed to rinse my mouth as often as I pleased, and at the end I awarded myself a Victoria Cross for not swallowing a single drop of water during the process. Morally, I felt inches taller. Then I was allowed one ounce of water every two hours. Then a little milk and water, then egg and milk, later creamed fish and jelly. I begin to feel that I am within sight of a meal. From a form that was presented to me two or three days ago, I learned that the cost per patient had been carefully worked out, and it resulted in an odd 4s. 6d. Patients are requested to pay as much as they can towards the total. I signed for payment in full, and told the clerk I would make up the 4s. 6d. to a level 5s. if they would throw in a chicken or a couple of chops *at once*. The offer was declined, and I am still looking for that meal.

I chose the general ward—rather than a private or semi-private one—in which to get on with my living—or dying, because I thought it would be more interesting. No one sees human nature in the raw so plainly as does the doctor, if he has the faculties of observation and understanding, and if he lacks them he should leave the profession. So, in a hospital ward human nature is less disguised than it is in every-day life. Some of the characters here would delight a Neil Lyons or a W. W. Jacobs, and I have noted several for later use. But there is one gem I must chronicle at once. One old man, a recurring visitor to the hospital, with a fair native intelligence shot through with a kind of cunning, probably born of a very hard life, explained to a neighbouring patient that someone was suffering "room-a-tidy author-i-tis."

Delicious! I saved it up until my wife came in. It reminded me of the occasion when maddened by the books and papers on the floor of my room she determined upon a good clear up. I think most writers will have suffered from those afflicted with the complaint of "room-a-tidy author-i-tis."

For about a fortnight I lay upon my back with the strict injunction not to move. Above me a section of gas-pipe ran across a white-washed ceiling. I don't know whether any of my readers have devoted themselves to an esoteric or exoteric study of such a combination. True, it offers a rather restricted field, but there are possibilities. I bi-sected, tri-sected and quartered that piece of piping, calculated how much of the ceiling would be covered by it if it were turned into a circle, or triangle, or a square. I marked the differences of the depth, the coloration of the white-wash, and solemnly considered how the ceiling would have looked had the "wash" been parti-coloured, and how many chess-boards of a given size could be marked out on its surface. One morning I had a quite interesting moment. There was a spot on the ceiling that was not there the previous evening. Was it a fly-speck or just a bit of dust? I studied both possibilities, but without reaching a satisfactory conclusion. I could not decide, and then one morning the cleaner went over the ceiling and the speck disappeared. The woman lacked the scientific curiosity to determine its nature. If Newton had been equally incurious concerning the "why" of an apple's fall the world might have waited for generations for a theory of celestial gravitation. If Darwin had been less inquisitive as to the meaning of freshly turned earth he would never have written his wonderful book on earthworms. My cleaner was no relation of either Newton or Darwin. Lying on my back, looking most of the time along a plane surface, I spent a long time speculating as to what would have been the case with the world had the eye been capable of lateral vision only. Probably it would have looked even more on edge than it is at present.

But I am definitely getting better. Owing to my known vices being comparatively harmless, and the rest being undiscovered, I have made a fairly quick recovery, mounting from zero to —? And while it may be some months before I am quite well again, my friends in all parts of the world may rest assured that—larring accidents—there is now no cause for alarm. The truth is that for about 22 years I have been steadily doing the work of two men. Mainly, I did it because I loved to do it. But beyond a certain point nature takes no notice of our likes or dislikes, our moral or immoral propensities, or the qualities of our work. On a cold night, a well-wrapped, well-fed burglar, runs fewer risks than the good, law-abiding citizen who is under-fed and ill-clothed. Most of all, I shall have to arrange a life that has hitherto been left to arrange itself, and to exercise care where no care has been taken. My wife and son look like taking a hand in this part of a disagreeable business, and for a time I expect to feel as one at the end of a chain. Still I shall continue busy, if not quite so busy as I have been in running about the country. Much of this is, except for the next few months, speculative. I have the summer before me, and I intend taking as much rest as is possible. I may add that although I have been pulled down physically, my brain has never functioned better, my mind has never been clearer than it is at the moment. Perhaps that is an indication of how much rest was needed.

I cannot conclude without saying how deeply I have been touched by the shoals of letters sent, the telephone messages, the personal calls, all enquiring about my welfare. These expressions of interest and affection have touched me more than I can say. I have never written or worked for appreciation or gratitude, but they are none the less welcome when they come unsought. The fact that so many are in-

terested in my welfare will not be forgotten. I have a duty to what theatrical stars call "my public," and also to what has been my life's work. I intend to take care because I want to continue my work, and I want to die unbeaten. And if I am lucky enough to die in harness I shall not be beaten because I shall not be there when King Death turns the final trick.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE,

EDITORIAL

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Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

T. SMITH.—Good wishes, whether from Christians or Free-thinkers are quite welcome. And, after all, the *Free-thinker* is kept in being to benefit Christians as well as Free-thinkers. Many have, and many will benefit from it. Your question is too large to be dealt with at the moment.

PRO REASON.—Pleased to hear from a new reader. There should be no compromise where a statement of opinion is in question. May find a place later.

F. C. HEDWOOD.—The pamphlet has been passed to Mr. Cohen. We have received many letters on the subject, but most traverse the same ground.

WILL the writer from Bradford, who has ordered *Love and Virtue* send his name, so that the book can be forwarded?

FOR Advertising and Distributing the *Freethinker*, W. James, 3s.

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

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

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

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.

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

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

Sugar Plums

Mr. Cohen's article "Jottings from a Sick Bed," will alone be enough to assure his friends that he is making good progress on the way to recovery. He has also been able to write a few paragraphs. He is not yet allowed to leave his bed, but expects to do so about the time this issue of the *Freethinker* is on sale. But he will not be able to leave the hospital until early in March, and afterwards a couple of months with as much rest as he can be induced to take should make him ready for the Society's Annual Conference.

Letters from all parts reach Mr. Cohen, and he wishes us to say how greatly he appreciates their tone and contents. They help to reconcile him to the monotony of

lying in bed day after day. The one injunction of all the letters and messages is "get better, for your own sake and for the sake of the movement." Mr. Cohen says he would be very ungracious not to do what he can to act on the advice, and he would like to add two reasons more for getting better than "for the sake of those who have written." It is something to have so many and such loyal friends.

The Liverpool Branch N.S.S. are to be congratulated upon a successful week-end. The meeting in the Picton Hall last Sunday was a real live one. The lecture was followed with interest, and by a number of useful questions, so that Mr. Rosetti had a good evening. The Fourth Annual Dinner of the Branch, held on Saturday evening, was also a successful and enjoyable function. The speeches were all good and pointed, with the humorous and serious well blended. The musical programme which followed had been well arranged, and the artistes were all good, and helped immensely towards making the Fourth Annual Dinner one of the best. The Branch President, Mr. J. V. Shortt, was in the Chair on both evenings.

Mr. Ernest Thurtle, M.P. for Shoreditch, on February 12, introduced a Bill for the abolition of prosecutions for the expression of opinions on religion. The Bill was read a first time. Mr. Thurtle was responsible for the introduction of the last Bill for the abolition of the Blasphemy Law. That Bill passed its second reading, and was withdrawn in Committee owing to the wrecking tactics of the Government. We hope that all interested will make it their business to let the public and their Parliamentary representatives know that a Bill for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws is before Parliament, and to do what they can to secure support for the measure.

A protest against the circulation in this country of the *British-Italian Bulletin*, is made in the *Daily Telegraph* of January 13 by Dr. A. H. Birch, Headmaster of Lashfield Secondary School. Dr. Birch says in the course of his argument:—

This Italian propaganda is doubly pernicious inasmuch as it is unpatriotic—seeing that our Government has pronounced Italy the aggressor.

The italics are ours, and the words so marked makes us wonder at this queer description of patriotism. The *Bulletin* offers some fine studies in falsification, but these apparently are not the grounds of its want of patriotism. This lies in the fact that it contradicts a Government. We were always under the impression that the greatest patriots in our history are those who have contradicted the Government, and that no one but a fool ever accepts a Government assurance without the very closest scrutiny. We sincerely hope that Dr. Birch does not teach his pupils that patriotism consists in blind faith in the Government, or that it is unpatriotic to believe that more than any other body the word of a Government needs carefully scrutinizing before it is accepted.

The West Ham Branch will hold a social in Earlham Hall, Earlham Grove, Forest Gate, London, E., on Saturday Feb. 29. There will be the usual full programme of singing, dancing, games, etc., and friends and sympathisers with the movement are heartily invited. Proceedings will begin at 7 p.m. prompt, admission is free, with a collection towards expenses. Full particulars concerning membership in the Branch, offers of help, etc., should be obtained from Mr. F. Warner, 83a Dawlish Road, Leyton, London, E.10.

We mentioned a week or two ago that the number of readers of important books does not increase in proportion to population. A note in a paper reminds us that the first Vol. of Gibbon's history appeared in February, 1776, and consisted of an edition of 1,000 copies. The price was one guinea. A second edition of 1,500 copies was published in June, and a third edition a year later. How many books of a similar character would have a larger circulation to-day?

A member of the N.S.S. living in Blackpool would like to get in touch with other Freethinkers in that district with the ultimate view of forming a Branch of the Society in Blackpool. Those interested are asked to communicate with Mr. J. Avis, 62 Woolman Street, Blackpool, Lancs. We hope there will be a ready response, and that similar action will be taken in other towns where no branch of the N.S.S. exists at present.

Some Martyrs of Edessa

(Concluded from page 107)

V.

HABIB THE DEACON³⁹

"IN the month of Ab of the year six hundred and twenty of the Kingdom of Alexander of Macedon, in the consulate of Licinius and Constantine," "in the days of Cona, Bishop of Edessa," then began a persecution of the Christians, because they refused to obey the orders of "the Emperor Licinius," enjoining them to sacrifice unto the heathen deities. Habib, a deacon from the village of Telzaha near Edessa, secretly encouraged the Christians in the district. But, "the Sharirs of the city," discovering this fact, reported him "to Lysanias the governor" then present in "Edessa," who in turn reported him to "Licinius the emperor," asking what should be done with him, and with others who likewise refused the prescribed sacrifices. Hitherto there was no stated penalty for breaking the prescription, and as it was rumoured that Constantine "in Gaul and Spain," had become a Christian, Lysanias felt the need of precise instructions. In reply, Licinius ordered "death by fire," and "death by the sword" as the penalties to be exacted. Habib, although away when the emperor's decree arrived, surrendered himself to the governor, fearing for his own "salvation" in the future life. This surrender infuriated Lysanias, who, instead of executing Habib forthwith, commanded him to be greatly tortured in order to increase his punishment and to deter similar offenders. Lysanias then interrogated Habib, who replied boldly, insulting the national deities. Lysanias had him scourged by five men, and then threatened to have him severely torn with combs, grievously afflicted with other tortures, and finally burned alive. Habib said that all these were less than he had expected. Lysanias then had him put into the murderers' iron cage, and suitably scourged; after which he sent him to solitary confinement. On the second of Ilul, he had him brought from the prison, and menaced him with cruel combing. Habib still refused obedience. Thereupon, Lysanias had him stretched out and scourged all over his body. Habib made light of these torments, and said that God would scourge the governor in another world. Lysanias, hearing these words, had him hung up for a long while so that "the shoulder-blades of his arms creaked," and all this time he was being pushed about and torn with combs. As Habib still persisted in his refusal, Lysanias again menaced him with worse sufferings. To this Habib replied that as Lysanias had already far exceeded the Emperor's edict, he was himself guilty of disobedience. After a lengthy interloction, Lysanias had Habib once more combed over his wounds. Further argument followed, and after telling the governor that it was forbidden to cast pearls before swine, Habib insolently defied the threats which this gibe evoked. In the end, Lysanias ordered him to be gagged like a murderer, and consumed by a slow fire. Upon this

³⁹ *Martyrdom of Habib the Deacon*, Cureton, pp. 73-85. Cod. B only.

sentence, Habib, accompanied by a crowd of rejoicing Christians, and threatening Pagans, was taken out of the city. His mother, clad in white, went with him to his death. In spite of the gag, Habib delivered a long prayer addressed to "King Christ," in which he said that he had not fled his tormentors for fear of falling into Christ's hands; and that he desired to be saved by temporal fire from eternal fire; after which he blessed the assembly. Habib was then placed in an excavation, and reared against a stake. He promised not to stir if left unbound. Faggots were put round him, and set alight. The flames rose fiercely, and the bystanders cried, "Open thy mouth." This he did "and his soul mounted up." His body, snatched from the pile, was wrapped in fine linen with unguents and spices, and buried in the tomb of the martyrs Guria and Shamuna, some even of the Jews and Pagans assisting at his obsequies. This tragedy took place on "the sixth day of the week, the second of the month Ilul," the date when news came of Constantine's incipient departure "from the interior of Spain" for the city of Rome, there to encounter Licinius, "who," adds the writer, "has dominion over the Eastern parts which pertain to the Romans; and lo, the countries are in commotion on all sides, because no man knoweth which of them will be victorious and continue in the power of the empire." He also declares that the notaries recorded what passed in the judgment hall; that the Sharirs recorded what passed outside thereof, attesting the same unto the judge; and that the records are preserved in the Acts. He says that his name is Theophilus and that he "wrote a copy of these Acts of Habib," as he had done in the case of Shamuna and Guria, fellow martyrs of Habib, whom Habib himself had felicitated.

Referring to Shamuna, Guria, and Habib, Theophilus says:—

I have written the year, and the month, and the day of their being crowned as martyrs, not indeed for the sake of those who saw the deed, but in order that they who come after us might learn what was the time of these martyrs, and what kind of men they were. (p. 85.)

Them and other martyrs he affirms to have "suffered for the hope of the future reward." Having once denied his faith, he now prays that the dust from the feet of the martyrs after whom he ran on the day of their execution may procure him pardon for his erstwhile apostacy. A sort of postscript asserts that the judge sentenced Habib after interrogating him twenty-seven times.

REMARKS

The Acts of Habib attribute his martyrdom to the 620th year of the Greek reckoning, which coincides with the 309th year of our era. The *Acts* also say that the year in question was one when Licinius and Constantine were the consuls. Liebenham states that these two men were consuls together in A.D. 309, 313 and 315. By A.D. 309 Licinius and Constantine were already emperors, but this cannot have been the year of Habib's death, for the account says that he was burned upon the day when news came that Constantine was beginning his departure from Spain to encounter Licinius at Rome, which could not be in A.D. 309, since it was not until A.D. 314 that the two emperors came to blows. They were soon reconciled, but, in A.D. 323, Constantine sought a quarrel with Licinius, whom he defeated and imprisoned, putting him to death in the following year. On no occasion did Constantine come from Spain to attack Licinius at Rome; and on both occasions when he attacked him, Rome was in his own power. It is a fact, how-

ever, that in A.D. 312 Constantine came from Gaul over the Cottian Alps, and, after some preliminary engagements, routed the Emperor Maxentius near Rome, thus becoming master of this city. Eusebius⁴⁰ says that towards the end of his reign Licinius, partly from hatred to Constantine, subjected the Christians to a very severe persecution, inventing new torments for the purpose; and that at this time Constantine whose ruin he was seeking took up arms against him, and defeated him completely. Cureton⁴¹ mentions that Asseman⁴² refers Habib's martyrdom to A.D. 323 because the Lycinian persecution ended in this year. Theophilus speaks as if at the time he is writing the struggle between Licinius and Constantine were still undecided, but it would be rash to take this indication as sure evidence that the account was written at the period of their contention for it may be nothing more than a fiction introduced by a forger, who long after their period sought to give his narrative an appearance of verisimilitude. Perhaps he only spoke rhetorically. For a very eloquent oration upon Habib which is attributed to Mar Jacob, Bishop of Batnæ in Osroene, who was born A.D. 452 and died A.D. 521, says in respect to the persecution of Christians at Edessa:—

With Sharbil it began, with Habib it ended in our Land. From that time until now not one has it slain: since he was burned, Constantine, the chief of victors reigns; and now the Cross the emperor's diadem surmounts, and is set upon his head.

But, as Constantine died one hundred and fifteen years before Mar Jacob was born, this statement about him, unless it is mere rhetoric, could never have found place in any of Mar Jacob's authentic orations.

Theophilus, after saying that he it was who copied the Acts of Habib, says that he "had formerly written of Shamuna and Guria." These two are the Samonas and Gurias whose martyrdom I related from an account thereof given by Simeon Metaphrastes, who in all probability got his information upon the matter out of what Theophilus says that he himself had written concerning it. For, after dealing with Samonas and Gurias, Metaphrastes proceeds at once to deal with him after the manner of the Acts which Theophilus professes to have copied. The main difference is that Theophilus occupies nearly twelve pages, whereas Metaphrastes occupies only about three pages. He calls Lysanias "prefect (*Prases*) of Edessa," and says that from the time of Habib's death, the power of Licinius diminished, whilst that of Constantine increased. This, according to Asseman, indicates the end of A.D. 323 as the time of Habib's death, for in A.D. 324 Constantine vanquished Licinius, and thus ended the persecution of the Christians.⁴³

The most interesting feature in the present *Acts* is the clarity wherewith they expose the moral worthlessness of the motive which has always impelled Christians when they have faced martyrdom in the course of conflict either with some other religion or with some other section of their own religion. They suffered terrific torments and died frightful deaths because they felt perfectly sure that if they denied their faith in order to escape dire penalties from the hands of man, they would incur far more direful penalties from the hand of God. Inspired by the base passion of fear they chose the lesser of two evils, and thus exemplified prudence, but not obedience to moral law.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

⁴⁰ H.E. (x. 8).

⁴¹ p. 199.

⁴² L., p. 331.

⁴³ L., p. 331.

Religion and Morality

At a recent meeting of a London Branch of the Historical Association, the Professor who gave the lecture said, among other things, that in sheer intellectual capacity the native people of India are equal to any other people in the world. In seconding a vote of thanks to the lecturer, I mentioned my first acquaintance with that statement. It was made about half a century ago by Richard Proctor, an eminent astronomer and general intellectualist of the time. I recalled, but did not mention, another statement that has for a long time been associated in my mind with the foregoing. It is to be found in that voluminous and learned work, *Historians' History of the World*, and is (in the following or very similar words): The natives of India are at once the most religious and the most immoral of civilized peoples.

A few days before the historical meeting I heard a lecture by Sir John Harris on Abyssinia; and he stated that the people of that country are the most religious and the most cruel of peoples. Being ignorant of the course of Ethiopian Christianity, I looked up the subject in an encyclopedia and in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*. The accounts are meagre up till 1500 or so; but they seem to indicate that the people were agreed on the variety of Christian doctrine they had adopted, and that in the main they escaped the internecine quarrels that marked the establishment of the Roman Church in the West. But the later religious brutality of Christendom was carried into the country by the Jesuits.

After the Abyssinians or Ethiopians had "slept for near a thousand years, forgetful of the world, by whom they were forgotten," and "had almost relapsed into savage life," the Portuguese appeared in the country, saved the people from imminent conquest by Turks and Arabs, and then tried to convert them from their own to the Roman Catholic variety of Christianity. But being Monophysites, holding the one-natured theory, these Ethiopians branded the Latins with being Arians and Nestorians, imputing the adoration of four gods to those who separated the two natures of Christ. But Jesuit missionaries were tolerated; two emperors were converted, the second of whom tried—of course at the instigation of the Jesuits—to establish the Inquisition, with the imposition of the death penalty on all who persisted in the Monophysite belief. This, measure, however, was strongly and successfully resisted; the people "trembled with horror when the most holy of their dead were torn from their graves," when "the most illustrious of the living were excommunicated by a foreign priest." After much fighting, in which "whole legions were slaughtered on the field or suffocated in their caverns," and a period during which "neither merit nor rank nor sex could save from an ignominious death the enemies of Rome," an edict of liberty was issued. Subsequently the Latin Patriarch was expelled, with rejoicing that "the sheep of Ethiopia were delivered from the hyenas of the West."

During the last two or three decades the isolation of the Abyssinians has been less than was previously the case, and some features of civilization have been adopted. An attempt is being made to abolish slavery; education (apart from the "schools" of the Church, which use a dead language called "Geez"), began in 1907, and there are now ten public schools, and about the same number respectively of Protestant and Roman Catholic schools. Doubtless this progress will continue, when an end is put to Mussolini's attempt to civilize the people with bombs, poison gas, tanks and machine guns.

To make any considerable advance, however, it will be necessary to remedy the well-nigh universal illiteracy; and this will, of course, be followed by the breakdown of the enormous power of the Church, its priests and monks, and also of the all-pervading superstition.

The significant lesson we learn from the two countries mentioned is that whatever effect may have been produced by two or three thousand years of intense religious belief and practice, it did not forward civilization in general or ordinary morality in particular.

J. REEVES.

The Debate that Collapsed

THE CHURCH UNION SEVEN YEARS ASSOCIATION AND ITS CHAMPION

In September last I was present at a lecture given by Mr. Winckworth, under the auspices of the above organization, in the Fulham Town Hall. The title of the lecture was "Atheism," but such was the distortion of the subject that I felt it should not pass unchallenged. I therefore invited Mr. Winckworth to debate with me.

On October 23, 1935, I received a letter from the Secretary of the Church Union, agreeing that the debate should take place.

A letter of October 30 informs me that the Town Hall, Fulham, had been booked for February 20, and that the title "Should We Believe in a God?" was accepted by Mr. Winckworth. A letter of January 13, stated that Mr. Ralph Sutton, K.C., had agreed to take the chair, and that arrangements were then completed, according to the time-table and details enclosed, which I accepted.

But on January 17 I received a letter from the Secretary stating that "owing to various local circumstances in Fulham, Mr. Winckworth is persuaded that no useful purpose will be served by holding the debate on February 20. He must cancel that engagement."

I am interested to know just *what did happen* between January 13 and 17 to cause Mr. Winckworth to retreat, and so let The Church Union down as he has done.

To say "It would serve no good purpose," appears to me to be an evasion that is open to serious question. Mr. Winckworth not only has God on his side, but The Church Union Seven Years Association. Yet with all this encouragement to defend his belief, he lacks the necessary courage to put his faith to the test of free and honest criticism. I as an Atheist am always ready to submit my ideas to such a test, but then I am only concerned in arriving at the truth irrespective of the consequences to my present convictions.

Is Mr. Winckworth's faith so poor a thing that he is unwilling to subject it to the test of Reason? This appears to be applicable to The Church Union as a whole, because it has not yet replied to my letter asking them to select one of their number to debate with Mr. G. Bedborough.

It will no doubt be a comfort to Mr. Winckworth and his Association to know that by such timidity on the part of Christians Secularism is encouraged in its fight against superstition and the forces of reaction.

C. TUSON.

I have ever believed and do now know, that there are witches; they that doubt them do not deny them, but spirits, and are obliquely and upon consequence a sort, not of infidels, but of Atheists.—*Sir Thomas Browne*.

Religious people speak much of the pain caused to them and their like by attacks on their beliefs; they say little of any pain they have felt on finding that they had denounced the bringer of a new truth.—*J. M. Robertson*.

Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

MASONRY AND ATHEISM

SIR.—"Eleansis" asks for any reason why a "Mason" cannot become an "Atheist." The answer is there is no reason at all save the inevitability of consequence, but an "Atheist" could not become or remain a "Mason" and retain his self-respect.

I would refer "Eleansis" and any other interested person to *A Concise History of Freemasonry*, by Robert Freke Gould. On page 348 he sets out the "Charge Concerning God and Religion," which is: "Let a man's religion or mode of worship be what it may, he is not excluded from the Order, provided he believes in the glorious architect of heaven and earth, and practise the sacred duties of morality."

The foregoing Charge refers to England; in France there is none. It covers all believers in God, but until the Charge is removed there is no hope for Atheists being welcomed into the oath-bound craft of freemasonry; nor can I imagine an Atheist being anxious to join.

VERITAS.

SIR.—Eleansis (*Freethinker*, February 9) seems concerned in trying to couple the above together, and although I have no experience of Masonry I venture to say it cannot be done.

About two years back a man with whom I had done business for twenty-five years, asked me if he could propose me as a mason in his lodge. He said it was very unusual for masons to suggest this, and I have been assured by another mason that this is so.

Naturally before consenting I desired to know the procedure of joining. This brought a protest that he couldn't impart to me any of the secrets of masonry. My reply was that I didn't want to know any silly secrets, but was there any religion about it? This drew from him the fact that to become a mason the candidate has to go through a "deeply religious ceremony." But he said (knowing my Atheism) that I would surely do that to become a mason. My acquaintance of twenty-five years had a very warm time for the next few minutes listening to my remarks concerning what I would not do to join that particular crush. This, of course, does not help the problem of Eleansis as to whether a Mason can become an Atheist, but it may show why an Atheist cannot become a Mason.

A. HARVEY.

SIR.—Probably the reason why a Mason cannot become an Atheist is that it is a case of conflicting loyalties.

At the age of 20 I became a Mason, while my own Father was the Worshipful Master. I then had to swear, as a "man of honour that I would never wilfully reveal any parts or points of the secrets or mysteries of or belonging to ancient Freemasonry." I further had to solemnly promise that I would not write those secrets, mask, carve, engrave or otherwise them delineate under no less a penalty on the violation of any or either of them than that of having my throat cut across, my left breast torn open and branded as a wilfully branded individual—void of all moral worth. See p. 43 *The Oxford Ritual of Craft Freemasonry*.

During the Great War my emancipation from the "Craft" was complete. Then I discovered it was the legitimate field of the Schemers, Social Climbers, Stick-in-the-muds, and Clerics.

It represents the cultural level of the vast majority, while the Freethought Movement is the highest flight of Civilization.

The interests of Masonry and Freethought are diametrically opposed.

As a "grown-up," I should have made my choice and discarded Masonry as the swaddling clothes of my childhood.

"ORPHEUS."

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON

OUTDOOR

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, Debate—"Did William Shakespeare, Actor, Write the Shakespearean Plays?" *Affir.*: Mr. T. F. Palmer. *Neg.*: Mr. W. Kent.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) : 11.0, W. B. Curry, M.A., B.Sc.—"Science and Human Welfare."

STUDY CIRCLE (68 Farringdon Street, E.C.4) : 8.0, Monday, February 24, Mr. A. D. McLaren—"Platonism."

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (The Labour Rooms, 70 Grange Park Road, Leyton, E.10) : 7.30, Paul Goldman—A Lecture.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.) : 7.30, Archibald Robertson—"Byways in English History."

COUNTRY

INDOOR

BIRKENHEAD (Wirral) BRANCH N.S.S. (Beechcroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane, Birkenhead) : 7.0, F. G. Stevens—"Home and Foreign Missions."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Shakespeare Rooms, Edmund Street, Birmingham) : 7.30, Impromptu Debate—"Has Christianity Done Anything for True Morality?"

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Tavern Hotel, Godwin Street, Bradford) : 7.15, Mr. T. Sutcliffe—"What is Life?"

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley) : 2.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"The Myth Theory."

EDINBURGH BRANCH N.S.S. (Free Gardeners' Hall, Picardy Place) : 7.45, Professor V. G. Childe—"The Roots of Racial Mysticism."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow) : 7.0, Mr. E. F. Penson—"Why I Left the Church."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall Humberstone Gate) : 6.30, Mr. E. H. Hassell—"Christianity and War."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Cooper's Hall, 12 Shaw Street, Liverpool) : 7.0, C. McKelvie—A Lecture.

MIDDLESBOROUGH (Labour Hall, Grange Road, Middlesborough) : 7.15, Mr. H. Dalkin—A Lecture.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Green Street) : 7.0, Miss E. Moore—A Lecture.

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HUMANITY AND WAR

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