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

Views and Opinions

Impertinent Piety

A THING established is not bound to be objectionable, but it tends to become so. In the first place, it is very likely that because it has lived long enough to become established it has outlived some, if not all, of its usefulness. Conditions change, and the belief or the institution that was taken up on account of its utility acts itself as an agent of the change that helps to put it out of date. That is one reason why we have so often the phenomenon of the Radical becoming a Conservative in his old age. He has not gone back; it is the age that has gone on and he has failed to keep pace with it. In the second place, the mere fact of establishment tends to breed a quite unnecessary feeling of superiority, and an air of condescension towards other things not so fortunately placed. What is at first accepted as a privilege, is next taken as a matter of course, and later demanded as a right. It is an insult to question its claims, while the power it wields provides numerous occasions for the exercise of what is little short of actual impertinence. It is, in fact, true of both individuals and institutions that power and privilege are things which very few are able to withstand. Hard as it is to suffer defeat, it is still more trying and still more a test of character to overcome the temptations provided by success.

* * *

Christians and Others

Religion offers the finest field for the illustration of the truth of what has been said, as it does of so many other unlovely mental and moral qualities. Religious belief has been so long an established fact in social life that many honestly believe life to be impossible without it. For centuries it was regarded as a criminal offence to question its claims. Even when this is not legally punishable, it is considered "bad form," and results in social condemnation. The claims of others are first of all ignored, and finally

treated as non-existent; a temper of mind is created which in its operations is little short of being actually impertinent. Christians, for example, calmly speak of this being a Christian country, and in practice ignore the fact that there are millions of other people who are not Christians, everyone of whom should have the same legal rights and the same social privileges as themselves. In the long-standing controversy over religious education in the public schools, Nonconformists and Churchmen discuss the subject as though, so long as they can agree upon the kind of religion that is to be taught in the schools, there is no need to trouble about other people. In the matter of the Blasphemy Laws Christians demand a special consideration for their own religious opinions, which they would never dream of extending to other people, and are surprised when here and there are some who are driven to make a practical protest against such pretensions. There are scores of illustrations of the same kind that might be cited, and never does it dawn upon the Christian intelligence that in most instances this attitude is little better than a vulgar impertinence.

* * *

Unbelief and Morals

A good illustration of this pious impudence is found in a single sentence which reaches me in a report of a religious meeting held in the Queen's Hall, Blackburn. The speaker was dwelling upon the need of Christianity for the town, and he said there were large numbers of people in Blackburn who might be saved by the Gospel. These were "the wicked, the weary, the wretched, the doubtful, the agnostic, the sinful and the abandoned." I do not imagine for a moment that the speaker had any idea of the gross arrogance involved in the classification. This lumping in of the Freethinker with the wicked, the weary and the abandoned is quite common, and it serves its purpose. It helps to confuse, in the muddled mind of the general public, the Freethinker with all sorts of undesirable characters and unhappy states of mind, and in the end the average Christian takes it for granted that the man who is not a Christian must be of a lower type than himself, probably a bad man and certainly a wretched one. If a Freethinker were to lump Christians with criminals and undesirables, he would be told that he was indulging in vulgar abuse. But the Christian indulges in this genuinely vulgar abuse with the freedom established by long practice and because those who should correct him too often remain silent. For this habitual assumption of moral superiority appears to have a terrifying effect upon certain unbelievers. The gregarious instinct in them overpowers their individuality, and as they do not wish to be ranked—even in name—with an imputed anti-social group, they remain silent where they should be vocal, and thus encourage the Christian in his self-glorification.

The Superior Person

In one of his books—the *Praeterita*, I think—Ruskin speaks of his immeasurable disgust on hearing a preacher in some miserable little chapel with a congregation of about forty, damning all who were not included in his own miserable following. No doubt the preacher was quite unconscious of the impudence of it all, as unconscious as is the man who comes round delivering tracts at one's door inviting us to strive to reach his own heights of spiritual and moral elevation. But the attitude is very common. The Bishop of London once said that when a man doubted the truth of the scriptures he always looked back to some dark chapter in that man's life for an explanation; and some years ago the Rev. Dr. Horton suggested that all who did not believe in immortality should be banished from human society. And how often does one hear a Christian, with the air of one struggling to be impartial, saying that in his opinion there are some Freethinkers who are as good as Christians. The impudence and the egotism of it! And the Christian actually feels that he has proved his own worthiness by conceding so much. Or one meets with the Christian who professes his profound sorrow on hearing that one is a Freethinker. Both of these groups join with the converted ex-convict, ex-drunkard, or ex-wife beater, in praying that some poor lost brother may see the light and so reach the pinnacle of excellence that they have attained. They are all samples of the impudent egotism developed by Christianity. The majority of conscious Christians appear to move in an atmosphere of spiritual and mental superiority. The narrower, the more ignorant they are, the more certain they are of their incontestable excellence. In secular matters it is common to find the man who is ignorant oppressed by his shortcomings. In religion ignorance serves only to give point and power to egotism. When Dickens drew the character of Uriah Heep he pilloried this type for ever. It is the type of the man who struts—or crawls—through life with his mouth filled with professions of meekness and humility, but with the underlying conviction of his own immeasurable superiority to all around him.

* * *

A Psychological Product

I once twitted a Christian with the impertinence involved in his unasked and unwanted concern for my spiritual welfare. He replied that every man was really his brother's keeper. I retorted that while that might be so, the Christian seemed to regard himself as everyone's warder. And that, I think, expresses the situation. The Christian persists in treating the rest of the world as actual or potential criminals, and himself as divinely commissioned to take them in charge. A very cursory examination of these people engaged in the work of "saving" others will show that with ninety-five per cent of them the motive power is not so much the desire to elevate others as to minister to their own sense of importance. They are the salt of the earth, the light set upon a hill, the chosen people of the new dispensation. Psychologically, the "humility" of the Christian marks an egotism of the most profound description, and it is not without justification that the more thoughtful of the Christian leaders have constantly warned their followers against the sin of "spiritual pride." But, as is usual, it is those who need the lesson least who have taken it to heart. The coarse, the brutal, the unintellectual, have merely had their egotism and impertinence strengthened by their belief. They have accepted themselves as superior persons because they held a creed which damned thousands of better men than themselves, and have been

strengthened in this impertinence by the identification, for professional purposes, of moral worth with intellectual difference. There is small wonder that with so lengthy a reign the impertinent egotism of the Christian has become so much a part of his nature that he is almost unaware of its existence.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(Reprinted, "Freethinker," January 20, 1924.)

Cock-Lane and Common Sense

"We think our civilization near its meridian, but we are yet only at the cock-crowing and the morning star."

Emerson.

"More life, and fuller, that we want."—Tennyson.

CHARLES BRADLAUGH, who was, in his own characteristic way, a keen critic, declared that religions did not die, but they changed, and Christianity itself is undergoing a great transformation under our very eyes. The alteration has been taking place so quietly that it appears to have been wrought with the complete unconsciousness of clergy and congregations alike.

In England, the Rev. F. D. Maurice, Canon Farrar, and other sentimental clergymen, seem to have been the prime movers in this silent revolution. With quiet persistence they persuaded a large number of their co-religionists that "hell," contrary to belief, was slightly less monotonous than "heaven" itself, and that everlasting punishment meant only an eternity of unpleasantness. Soon, blood and brimstone were eliminated from the vocabulary of a large section of the educated clergy, and to-day only the Romish Church and the Salvation Army preach a flaming hell of literal fire.

This dilution of dogma contradicted Christian teaching of twenty centuries, but it was only the beginning of the transformation scene. After that came the deluge, which has brought upon its flood undogmatic religionism, and the rest of the sentimental slush which is now masqueraded as the Christian religion. This wave of hysteria has had its disintegrating effect upon most of the churches and chapels. Painful Sabbaths have been ameliorated by pleasant Sunday afternoons. String bands and soloists take the place of leather-lunged preachers. Tame Labour leaders, Members of Parliament, converted worldlings, lady evangelists, and other notorieties, threaten to oust the very parsons from their pulpits. Some time since, at a leading Free Church place of worship, a well-known actor and a famous contributor to *Punch* occupied the pulpit in turn in order to pronounce eulogies upon a world-renowned Freethinker. It was magnificent, but it had no relation to the Christian Religion as taught for two thousand years. It shocks one, it is like meeting one's pet dog in the form of sausages. It can have but one meaning, it is the secularizing of Christianity.

Nor is this all of the strange story. The Prayer Book of the Established Church has suffered alteration. Changes have been made in the hallowed volume, and barbarous portions of the "Psalms of David" eliminated. It has even been suggested that the "strong language" in the Church of England Marriage Service is to be toned down. "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" If this terrible process is continued, the Holy Bible and a few medical books will be the only publications untouched by the dainty blue pencil of the censors.

Straws show which way the wind is blowing. In a statement of the post-war activities of the Free Churches, the secularistic tendencies of the Non-

conformists are revealed. It mentions that the Free Church Council represents the local councils, to which 10,000 Nonconformist Churches send delegates, and then adds:—

The local councils are composed of men and women who are peculiarly interested in the exemplary behaviour of the people, in the education, welfare, and health of the children, in fair wages, in sound housing conditions—in a word, in religion.

In this mendacious and misleading definition of religion the stern dogmas of orthodox Christianity have become of less importance than the snows of yesteryear. Nor, in the particular circumstances, is this so entirely surprising. Such awful facts as the world-war and the recent recrudescence of the Moloch of militarism must make thoughtful men and women pause in reciting the Christian shibboleths. Few, we imagine, feel inclined to refer to a Heavenly Father at the moment when Christian nations are manufacturing countless weapons of destruction, and training millions of men for wholesale murder. Their hands would be less inclined than usual to go up to "that inverted bowl we call the sky." Such horrors as this preparation for destruction are hard to reconcile with any consolatory scheme of religion, Christian or otherwise.

And mark you, who hears the pathetic cry of humanity in anguish? Is it the thorn-crowned "Messiah" with his thousands of angels, or the Divine Mother with cohorts of cherubim, who come to succour the unhappy ones? Not at all! Mankind is left to the League of Nations, and to the sympathy of other men and women.

Such a spectacle brings home to everyone capable of reflection the growth and change of ideas. Knowledge has widened in many ways never dreamed of in the celibate priestly philosophy of the Oriental Christian Religion. New tones have grown into human sentiment. All the lights and shadows of life have shifted, and its whole surface has been dyed in different colours. Naturally and inevitably we are progressing beyond the reach of two-thousand-years'-old ideals. They voice different views to those of our own day and generation, and men and women of our time find it increasingly difficult to respond to them. They sound like the "horns of Elfland, faintly blowing," and people are beginning to realize that they were meant for other ears than ours, and are but a belated echo from the far-off days of the Ages of Faith and Ignorance. The conscience of the race is slowly rising above the puerilities of old-world pietism. A new impulse is at hand to make men join hands and hearts. This impulse is Secularism, which will lead ultimately to the destruction of superstition and the betterment of humanity.

The plain, blunt truth is that the Christian Religion is crumbling. Never was there so little religion, never so much secularism, as at the present day. Never have people attended places of worship so little, never have they attended hospital and philanthropic meetings so assiduously. The Christian Religion is being slowly replaced by Secularism, and the chief barrier to that change is the wealth of the Churches, due to sheer extortion, and also to the generosity of long-dead believers. So long as Churches can pay men well for reciting their abracadabra; so long will men be found to recite it. Deprive the Churches of their ill-gotten wealth, and their power at once disappears.

Christian priests have levied a ten-per-cent tax on agriculture in this country for nearly two thousand years, and their pagan predecessors did it before them. Christian priests have exacted coal-royalties for centuries. Christian priests have collected

ground-rents and church taxes for many generations. And they have bullied believers on their death-beds in order to secure bequests. All this ill-gotten wealth is now being used to perpetuate an Oriental superstition, and to retard modern progress. Over the pulpits of the churches is inscribed: "To the glory of God," which, being translated, means, "To the advancement of Priestcraft." Secularism sounds the note of the future, "To the Service of Man." The priests' robes cover the huge imposture of an organized hypocrisy. Some day the democracy of this country will deprive the clergy of their ill-gotten wealth, and, echoing the words of Cromwell, will say: "Be gone and make place for better men." For there is as little likelihood of a revival of Christianity as of the Bishop of London's persuading the pavement artists of his diocese to unite with him in a prayer for rain.

MIMNERMUS.

The Witch Mania

VII.

EVERYBODY knows the efficacy of magic words. Abracadabra—properly pronounced, of course—is famous all over the world; though it is true, also, that nobody seems ever to have come across an example of what its correct pronunciation has ever done. Jehovah or Yahweh or IHVH, however you write it, is particularly blessed with magical properties. One of the Talmudic stories of Jesus, that is to say, of a Jesus, for there seems to have been quite a number, relates how he managed to steal the correct pronunciation of this ineffable word, and immediately commenced to fly in the air. Naturally, a very holy Jewish priest, who also was in possession of the secret, flew after him, and after a tussle, not easy to describe in polite language, Jesus fell to earth. What a boon the correct pronunciation would be to our aviators, especially in case of an aeroplane crash!

Nearly all religions seem to have had some mysterious word or words which, if only properly uttered, would do marvellous things; so it is not surprising to find that the same thing might be said of sorcery. The point about the words uttered by a witch or wizard is that they could evoke a devil, or an imp, or what is known as a *familiar*. These familiars almost always accompanied witches in some way; just as in these days, we get mediums with their "spirit-guides," those dear little "Red Clouds," or African chiefs, or French doctors, or such like people, who, though never English by birth, speak the language perfectly. Sometimes the magic words brought about storms or destroyed crops. We get a perfect example of this in that instructive story of Jesus (strange to say, it has never, I think, been put forward as an ideal example for us by the B.B.C. religious services) which shows him cursing a fig-tree till it withered. This incident should prove to the most sceptical, the malignant power of words.

In case any reader should like to know some of the magic words used by witches, I append a few. "Hail, Hola!" is supposed to be very effective. Then if you wish the devil to appear, it seems that "Benedicite" with "Maikpeblis" has done it often. It is on record that a witch, Marie Lamont, in 1662, managed to speak with the Devil by merely calling him "Serpent." "Robin" has been known to succeed, so has "Horse and Hattock, horse and goe, Horse and pellatis, Ho! ho!" Whether success will now follow any effort to utter these words perhaps

depends on their correct pronunciation or—as in religion—on faith.

Miss Murray, in her *Witch Cult in Western Europe*, gives some verses used by witches when they wished to change into hares, or cats, or crows, and back again; and there can be little doubt that all this was swallowed by the judges or inquisitors as gospel truth; and, of course, everybody knows the famous opening scenes in *Macbeth*, with the three witches and their incantations.

Both witches and wizards could "cast spells" without always cursing. Some of these spells were good; others bad. Witches could raise storms and cause shipwrecks. But they could also heal bad wounds, stop famines and cure incurable ailments. Wizards could stop hurricanes with a rope tied with three knots, or provide amulets for soldiers guaranteed to take them through any war without a scratch. The strange thing is that this was the boast of an English engineer (I believe he was) who was advertising a similar amulet in 1914 and 1915. He got many testimonials from the survivors.

Everybody has heard of the various "Sacred Hearts" in the Roman Catholic religion. In sorcery there is the "Hand of Glory"—which had to be taken from some poor wretch hanging on a gibbet and set in the sun to dry. It was used by thieves to make those whom they were about to rob quite motionless, and indeed, succeeded admirably in this. Nowadays, the same effect can be obtained with the aid of a gun, and the magic words, "Put 'em up," seem just as successful. The Hand of Glory became quite ineffective if the threshold over which thieves would have to enter were rubbed with "an unguent composed of the gall of a black cat, the fat of a white hen, and the blood of a screech-owl."

Needless to say, witches and sorcerers were often at enmity, and did their best to nullify each others' spells. A powerful wizard could easily overcome an inferior one. They would even try to exterminate each other with death philtres—that is, with drinks which were obviously poisons. Philtres were also used to induce love; and everybody knows how Tristan and Isolde together drank the love philtre intended for King Mark. Those who have been unlucky in love and would like to know what to do will perhaps find the following recipe as effective as most. It is taken from de Givry's work:—

To make oneself beloved, there shall be taken, the heart of a dove, the liver of a sparrow, the womb of a swallow, the kidney of a hare, and they shall be reduced to a palpable powder. Then the person compounding the powder shall add an equal part of his own blood, dried in the same way and powdered. If the person whom it is desired to draw into love is caused to swallow this powder in a dose of two or three drachms, marvellous success will follow.

The claims made for "holy waters" of some kind in our Catholic journals to-day are just as silly as those made for love philtres.

These love potions often contained some powerful drug, in some cases poisonous; and it was found that even the most heart-sick lover rather objected to swallow them; so that other recipes were given which sometimes contained magical formulas and words quite easy to follow. It is not stated whether any resulting success was due to the incantations or the persons themselves.

The worst spell was the death spell. You procured a small wax image of the gentleman or lady you wished to die and pushed a needle through its heart or a knife through its brain. It was in constant demand and use in France during the sixteenth century. No doubt readers will remember Dumas describing the kind of thing done in the court of France

of that era in his famous romance, *Marguerite de Valois*. De Givry gives the actual document written by Catherine de Medicis touching "Cosme Ruggieri, a Florentine, accused of having made a waxen image with hostile intent against the King, Charles IX., in 1574." As Charles died a month after the complaint—almost certainly poisoned—everybody believed that Ruggieri was guilty.

England under Elizabeth was also a prey to the same superstition. The people—mostly adherents of the Catholic faith—who did not like the Queen tried to injure her through wax images, one of which was found in Lincoln's Inn Fields, with a large pin stuck through the breast. The celebrated occultist and astrologer, Dr. John Dee, was hastily summoned, and with his anti-death spells soon calmed the agitated Elizabeth. There are many other cases recorded in history of the use of wax images, and they all add proof of the almost unbelievable credulity and superstition rampant everywhere in Europe—which have by no means died out yet. Apart from many cases of "witchcraft" taking place even in these days, and which one reads every now and then in the daily papers, there is the famous one which took place in Essex as late as 1863, which the *Times* considered to be "as genuine a case of witchcraft as was ever reported." An old man of 80 years of age, who had lived in the district for many years, had acquired some sort of reputation as a wizard merely because "of certain peculiarities of habit and manners." He was of excitable disposition, and expressed himself by singular methods of gesticulation. He seems to have had some sort of row with a woman named Smith, who thereupon fell ill. She believed herself bewitched, and meeting him one evening, begged him to take the spell away from her. He refused. She fell upon him in a state of frenzy and encouraged the crowd, rapidly assembling, to "swine" him; the idea being the old Saxon one that if he were innocent he would sink; if he floated, that was proof positive that he was guilty of being a sorcerer. In the old days this meant he would be burnt to death as a wizard. The poor old man survived the ordeal at the moment, but died later of the brutality to which he had been treated. Two ringleaders of the outrage got six months' hard labour when found guilty—they deserved more. As for the *Times*, its comments are quite amusing:—

We have only to say that if this old conjuror did really intend to frighten the woman into illness, and did wilfully refuse to go through the forms which she would have interpreted as releasing her—we have as complete, veritable, and real a case of witchcraft as can be found in any treatise. The difference is in the agency to be imputed. In the days of James I., it would have been universally believed that the sickness of Emma Smith was caused by virtue of powers derived from the Devil. In the evidence before us we must believe that the woman's illness arose from the old man's doings, or, at least, from the interpretation which she put upon them, but we have no need to assume the agency of the Devil in explaining the result. . . . The thing was a terrible reality, though it did not imply the work of the Devil.

We really ought to congratulate the writer of this article in the *Times* for his remarkable perspicacity.

But frankly, can we not better understand religion, why it grew and persisted, when we read of the credulous atmosphere in which people moved and had their being at the time when religion was almost all-powerful? Has not the work of Freethought been at its greatest in removing from the minds of men and women all this superstitious drivel?

H. CUTNER.

Things Worth Knowing*

XXX.

THE THEORY OF PERSECUTION

WHEN religion was considered a matter of public rather than private concern, the motives of persecution were naturally found in the order of considerations which we have called tribal or political. The wrath of the gods must be averted by the destruction of the blasphemers who provoked it; and the popular impulse to cast out the abominable thing was reinforced by the more astute reflection that whether the gods cared about it or not, persons who renounced the accustomed gods of the city could not be otherwise than bad citizens. Persecution on grounds of this kind is essentially a measure of public safety. . . .

If the authority of princes and rulers is divine, and if salvation is more important than any temporal interest, and the duty of saving one's soul paramount to all others, it is the manifest duty of princes and rulers to do what they can to ensure the salvation of their subjects. Further, if holding the true faith is essential to salvation, and the one true faith is known to be in the custody of the Church, it follows that the prince must support the Church at all hazards in preventing his subjects holding any other faiths. . . . It is easy to say that opinion cannot be coerced. But this, in the first place, is true only of the small minority of mankind who are in the habit of thinking for themselves; and, secondly, if it were true, it would only show that in some cases persecution is too late to be effectual. Not cure, but prevention is the main object. . . . If heretical opinions are damnable, and the infection of them dangerous to the soul, the best thing that the prince can do is to contrive that his faithful subjects shall have no opportunity of hearing them. The readiest way of doing this is to make heresy a crime, and inflict penalties on all persons who either publish or willingly listen to anything contrary to the Catholic faith. And if heresy be a crime, it is plainly a crime of the most heinous kind. Every heretic is a centre of infection and corruption infinitely more deadly than any physical pestilence. Even if his own soul is stubborn beyond saving, the souls of his innocent neighbours are in constant danger because of him. And if temporal welfare is indeed of no account in comparison to spiritual, no limit whatever can be assigned to the measures of repression to which an orthodox ruler should commit himself. Better a depopulated wilderness than a garden cultivated by heretical hands; better a poverty-stricken remnant of the faithful than an outwardly prosperous multitude sitting in the darkness of mortal error and under an eternal ban. The case for theological persecution is unanswerable if we admit the fundamental supposition that one faith is necessary to salvation. . . . Spain is the one country in which the policy of extermination has been consistently applied for a time long enough to produce its full results. For once the Church and the Inquisition had unbounded scope. The Moors and the Jews were expelled; even the suspicion of Judaizing or heresy was more dangerous than treason; the Catholic faith reigned without the shadow of a rival from the Pyrenees to the Atlantic, and Spain was intellectually and morally ruined. . . .

The Inquisitors doubtless thought that in burning

heretics they were vindicating the honour of God as well as preserving the souls of the people; and this is only a refinement of the old tribal feeling that the heretic is a curse to the land, which is by no means extinct even now in Catholic countries. The periodical massacres of Jews which disgraced every country in Europe in the Middle ages were partly due to this feeling; and it is notable that they were mostly not official but popular. . . . The position of the Jews in Catholic Europe was very like that of the Christians in the first two centuries of the Church. But the Jews were victims not merely of superstition, but of the commonest kind of jealousy. They added to the crime of infidelity that of being, in spite of vexatious and oppressive laws, richer and more clever than their neighbours.

Superstition engendered hatred; envy inflamed it; and envy, hatred and the lust of plunder fell back on superstition for an excuse.

In modern times religious and ecclesiastical controversies have become inextricably mixed up with political ones, and so long as theological persecution was esteemed a respectable motive, it was even found convenient to put it forward as a disguise or justification for animosities which were in truth merely political. It is barely needful to mention, as instances, the association of Anglicanism with the cause of the Crown, and Puritanism with that of the Parliament, or the conjunction in the following century of the Pope with the Pretender. And if Protestant supremacy had been doubtful at the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish Armada, a gigantic hybrid of theological and political ambition, would have sufficed to make it certain. . . .

The same experience which shows petty persecution to be ineffectual has also shown its purpose to be misconceived. Heterodoxy has had by this time a scope quite sufficient to display the mischievous results of toleration. Where are these results? The foundations of morality have not been weakened; the practice of it has not ceased; respect for the law has not diminished; society is not on the brink of dissolution. The civilized commonwealths of the world are not on the whole less orderly, less prosperous, or less flourishing in any way than they were two centuries ago. The disturbances and discontents that have arisen from time to time are traceable to natural political causes. Orthodoxy can allege with confidence only one evil consequence—namely, that heterodoxy and unbelief have increased. To an orthodox believer that is, of course, the greatest of evils; but whether it should be an evil in the eyes of the civil authority, which by the hypothesis is to judge of beliefs only by their fruits in action, is the very matter in question.

Essays in Jurisprudence and Ethics,
by SIR F. POLLOCK, pp. 151-64.

It is a melancholy thing to see Anglican Bishops, clothed in soft raiment, lodged in a public place, endowed with a rich portion of other men's industry, using their influence to deepen the ignorance and inflame the fury of their fellow-creatures.—*Rev. Sydney Smith.*

TITHES

Is there anything that can be conceived more hostile to natural justice than for men to be compelled to take away from the means of supporting their families a considerable part of the fruit of their labour, and to give it to men for preaching a doctrine in which they do not believe, and for performing a service in which their consciences forbid them to join? If there be anything more hostile to natural justice than this, I should like to have it pointed out to me.—*William Cobbett.*

* 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.

The Tonsure

I GIVE herewith a line-for-line translation of an interesting Christian poem of the third century A.D. It is attributed to Saint Cyprian, with the title *To a Certain Senator Converted from the Christian Religion to the Service of Idols*. The attribution may well be doubted, but the poem is a genuine Christian product, not very much later than Cyprian. It records better than any historical accounts the urgency of the conflict between the worshippers of Christ and Isis. One of the most striking touches is the abuse of the tonsure worn by the Isiac priests. Yet this piece of ritual was shortly to be adopted by the Christians themselves!

Here is the poem: the first English version, I think:—

When I behold you maddened yet again
with various religions dark and vain,
I'm horror-struck. Since songs you love, I'll try
to give in hasty verse my quick reply
and snatch you from the darkness to the light.
Now the Great Mother lures you—sad the sight.
You bow to her and own her goddess-claim
though all her votaries are burnt with shame.
Her priests in vestments womanish confess
the hidden vice according to the dress;
they think that wrong is right for them; they stalk
effetely through the street with prattling talk,
wagging their proffered bottoms all the time,
their sex-confusion blabbing out its crime.
During their festivals no joys they taste,
and for that period announce they're chaste!
What then of other days? But through the strain
of ritual, when briefly they abstain,
they rage, they slash their limbs, and blood they show . . .
What faith is this where actual blood must flow?

More I have heard. Before your years are grey,
Your worship makes you bald. You've put away
Your shoes and in papyrus-sandals range.
O such a headlong fall is very strange.
Think. If a tonsured consul strutted proudly,
the world would laugh. Then won't it laugh as loudly
at you, a consul once, with tonsured brow?
Since then you would have blushed, start blushing now
to damn your soul with wicked hymns that bring
responses from the people worshipping.
The fasces graced your image in the hall;
now dogfaced god and sistrum spoil it all.
Proofs of humility! Is that your game?
Such monuments will blot your future name.

A rumour reaches me. Your clothes you've rent.
"Goddess, I've sinned! Forgive, since I repent!"
Speak, on your life. What spoke she there with you
that thus you babble and for pardon sue?
All wits they lack who choose a witless guide.
You've fallen. Is your error still denied?
Learn your deserts. Far less would you be stained
if ignorant in darkness you'd remained;
but when you found the Law's one door and entered
and knew for years the God where Truth is centred,
why leave the One, to grasp at what must fall?
You worship nothing when you worship all.
One faith alone can teach you not to err.
You set up, fickle, as philosopher;
for if the popular wrath can sway your thought,
then you're the merest Jew, a will-less naught.

Hear what is written. Truth's too deep to please,
and all excess breeds contrarities.
For ice and fire will numb and burn as one;
darkness can blind us, like the dazzling sun;
a bath, too hot or chilly, weakens us;
and food that feeds destroys our bodies. Thus,
prolonged unduly, everything's diminished.
There's joy in sitting down when work is finished;
but soon it's work to sit. "Poor Theseus, he,"
so Vergil wrote, "must rest eternally."
There's pain in each protracted good or joy:
long fasts or dinners equally destroy.
Excess of wisdom makes a fool. "Embrace
guidance," the goddess told me. "Schools debase."
But schools and guidance both you leave behind.
No earthly storms can shake the stable mind;
it thinks no evil, simple in its quest.
True faith receives an everlasting rest,

but guile is crucified in flame. Then make
your choice, or, judged, in hell you'll toss and ache.
For there are punishments that never pall.
If truth is never known, the sin is small;
if truth is known yet left, the sin is worst of all.

But lengthening years perhaps may serve to win
your soul to truth and sate you with your sin.
Time changes all, time makes all evils halt.
So when advancing age redeems your fault,
keep faith with God, lest you by chance be led
to sin again. For truly it is said:
The man that kicks a stone and gives a groan,
yet kicks a second time upon the stone,
must blame himself, not chance. Then search your heart,
and trust in God. Come, make another start.
One fall's enough. No more by fear be driven.
A sin repented is a sin forgiven.

If passages in this version are crabbed it is because I reproduce the difficult style of the original, as anyone can test by looking the poem up in the *Anthologia Latina*: item 689b. The author employs arguments that are scarcely orthodox, showing himself to have been once a devotee of the schools—the paradox about opposites, the truism on time, and the stoic comments on the "stable mind." It is of interest to note the hatred of the Jew, as historians often argue that this was a later development. But most interesting is the fact that the reprobated elements of the Isiac religion—ritualistic chastity, vestments, tensure, hymns and responses for the people at worship, conviction of sin and repentance—are the very elements which were soon to become distinctively Christian. It is a pity that our documents dealing with these early centuries are so meagre. All the more reason then to deplore the comparative neglect that has been paid to the *Anthologia Latina*, of which the poem I translate is only one of many significant items, Pagan and Christian.

JACK LINDSAY.

Thomas Paine and a League of Nations

WE have been told over and over again that the adoption and enforcement of economic sanctions by the League of Nations against Italy is "the first of its kind in history," "the first great effort ever made to penalize a war-making nation by bloodless means."

One hundred and thirty-five years ago, Italy, with other nations, enforced an economic boycott against England. Italy then used as an instrument Thomas Paine's *Association of Nations*; Paine believed that "commerce contains within itself the means of its own protection" in time of war.

In the Summer of 1800 he prepared his Maritime Compact, which he submitted to all Ministers of neutral nations then in Paris. It provided for an unarmed Association of Nations for the protection of the rights of commerce of neutrals.

The original draft of Paine's compact, in his own handwriting, was sent to Jefferson, who wrote on March 18, 1801, acknowledging its receipt and stating: "These papers contain precisely our principles, and I hope they will be generally recognized here."

In his writings Paine tells us that as a direct result of his proposal Emperor Paul of Russia, "in the month of September following the publication of the plan, . . . closed all the ports of Russia against the ships of England." Other Governments did likewise, and the ports of Denmark, Hamburg, Prussia, Spain, Portugal and Italy, with the exception of Venice, were closed to England.

Paine's first principle was that in time of war neutral nations must act in unison. Alone and "individually," they "cannot resist" the unjust encroachments of belligerent nations upon neutral commerce.

Paine's second principle was that of peaceful boycott. The penalties provided in his pact, which were actually enforced, bound the signatory powers to refuse to import "any goods, wares, or merchandise, produced or manufactured in, or exported from, the dominions of the powers so offending against the association." The as-

sociated powers refused "remittances of payment in money, merchandise, or bills of exchange" by "any of the citizens or subjects of any of the powers composing this association, to the citizens or subjects of the offending nation . . . until reparation be made."

Another important principle was included in the provision that, immediately upon the breaking out of war, deputies were to be appointed by all neutral nations, whether members of the Association of Nations or not, "to meet in congress in some central place to take cognizance of any violations of the rights of neutral nations."

A touch of sentiment, such as often came cropping out of Paine's acts, should be noted. The flag of the Association of Nations, which was to be carried at the mast-head "conjointly with the national flag of each nation composing this association," was composed of the colours of the rainbow, arranged in the same order. This emblem testified eloquently to his lifelong dream of blending nations harmoniously.

R. C. ROPER (*New York Times*, December 1, 1935)

Acid Drops

By the way, we were interested in noting the form of one of the B.B.C. announcements on February 21. The announcer solemnly recited, "We are *privileged* to announce" that the King would Broadcast on a particular date. Not, we are pleased, or, we are able, but "*privileged*." Some of the papers of the same date announced that a woman in the Saar region had offered a certain hotel a considerable sum of money to be "*privileged*" to sleep in the bed that had been occupied by Hitler. We have not the slightest doubt that if the air exhaled by the King could be bottled there would be plenty who would pay a guinea for the "*privilege*" of sniffing it.

Every war repeats history—the same lies, the same essential *cowardice*. In a recent battle the Abyssinian losses are given by the Abyssinians at 215 killed and wounded. The Italians fix the losses at 15,000. And, of course, there is the same variation in the Abyssinian estimate of Italian losses. And, as usual, "Our gallant troops," find nothing objectionable in getting the "enemy" into a position where he is greatly outnumbered, inefficiently armed, and slaughtering him in circumstances where he has little or no chance of hitting back. Admiral Fisher's famous advice, "get your enemy down and then jump on his belly," admirably expresses the chivalry of modern warfare.

Having been told when to mourn the death of George V., the public is now told when to leave off mourning. After discussing with leaders of the textile trades, King Edward has decided that, in the interests of trade, mourning is to cease at Ascot, and coloured dresses, etc., are to be worn. Nothing can be more touching, or afford greater proof of the deep affection of the people for the King—any King—than the fact that they are ready to mourn or to cease mourning in accordance with a Court order.

Father Woodlock, the Jesuit priest, is very proud of the fact that, during the last 25 years, 250,000 persons have been received into the Roman Catholic Church. We can well believe it. There has been a very strong Romanizing influence in the Church of England, and there are a large number of people who are fundamentally religious. Had the one "true" religion in this country been that of Mithra or Osiris, it would have attracted the same number of "converts"—or even more. But Fr. Woodlock forgets one other little fact, and that is the number of Catholics who have lapsed entirely, or are so entirely indifferent that they can no longer be called Catholics—except, of course, for the purpose of statistics. This is recognized by the "hierarchy"—as the laments of Catholic bishops in their own journals abundantly prove. The "true" Church might be rela-

tively stronger, but it is, like all Churches, gradually losing its hold on the masses, especially as people become better educated.

The Government Education Bill is, we are told by one pious writer, opposed for different reasons by "Roman Catholic leaders, by the National Union of Teachers, by the Trade Unions, and by education experts in the Church." We think if this is so, and if some of the objections are based on religion, the sooner complete secular education is made compulsory in all State-aided schools the better. Most of the squabbling is on the question of religious teaching for "the Church has never abandoned its claim to impart religious teaching to its own children in the schools provided by the State"—as the aforementioned writer puts it.

The raising of the school-leaving age does not worry our pious critic as there "will be the due supply through the Church training colleges of teachers well-grounded in the Church's faith and possessed of first-rate professional equipment." And he is delighted that "on every side the authorities of the Church are confronted with opportunities and responsibilities" which they must use "against the insidious inroads of Secularism in every phase of public life." We can assure our critic that the Church will continue to face the "insidious inroads of secularism," not only in our schools, but also, as far as possible, everywhere else. In this we shall be helped by the people themselves. More and more they are realizing the value of making *this* the happy world; or else why all this squealing about "secularism"?

The question of Church and State has again come to the fore with the publication of the Report on the subject; and it is interesting to note how even religious critics are beginning to recognize that the State can no longer be dictated to by the Church. One of them admits that:—

In a largely secularized world—not to put it more strongly—it is unjust to expect the State to enforce Christian standards on the whole people. In other words, Church and State are bound in certain important respects to adopt different standards and a different outlook.

The admission that the world is "largely secularized" is significant. We may never make it wholly secular, but those who want religion and all it implies should be allowed freely to have it—at their own cost. And it is bound to come to that one day.

A writer in the *Methodist Recorder* doesn't like the word "beseech"—we share his antipathy, although our reasons are different. He says that this word, although "enshrined in books of devotion, is not used in the great prayers of the New Testament." In fact we only recall two instances. One was when the demon-possessed man said, "I beseech thee torment me not," and the other was St. Paul's remark about his "thorn in the flesh," "I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me." The prayer was unanswered, possibly because God also dislikes this canting phrase.

"Should a Christian Use His Brains?" asks Mr. Gordon James. Mr. James does not think much of the mentality of the average Christian. He quotes a general question amongst Christians "that it is not our intellectual belief but the surrender of our lives to God." As Mr. James believes that "we must seek God's guidance," however he may qualify the phrase, what is the use of brains to a Christian? If a Christian's brains simply agree with God's guidance, why have brains? If the brains and God don't agree—and we imagine they seldom do, the Christian will only be embarrassed by possessing—or using—brains. Mr. James must be sarcastic when he says: "Absence of brains is not a guarantee of saintliness."

Several pious but scarcely charitable Christians write to a religious journal asking why the clergy state in the Burial Service that the person being buried died "in sure and certain hope" of a resurrection he may have not qualified for a sure and certain faith. We can answer the query easily. If a parson once began to tell his customers that their dead relatives were buried "in sure certainty of Hell," that parson would quickly lose all burial fees. After all, there is rivalry even in parsons. Burial fees are an attractive perquisite which clergymen will not risk, unless they have the monopoly of the burial grounds for miles around.

News just received from Australia, tells us of a successful prosecution of a Church of England clergyman for heresy. He was the sort of heretic that Dean Inge and Bishop Barnes would be—if they lived in Australia. The Rev. H. E. Hayes was charged with the atrocious crime of disbelieving the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. The Ecclesiastical Commission of Australia have recommended that if Mr. Hayes refuses to resign, he shall be "removed" from his "office." In this part of the Empire, the Church of England still believes in its own creeds. Mr. Hayes was reminded by the authorities that the Nicene Creed and Article Two of the 39 Articles are still the law of the Church.

Bishop Reginald Stephen, preaching in St. Paul's Cathedral (Melbourne, Australia), defended the Ten Commandments. But even a Bishop in a Fundamentalist Commonwealth, hesitates to go the whole fundamentalist hog. "The Ten Commandments," he said, "appear at first sight, utterly unsuited to be the moral guide of life to-day." The Bishop safeguarded himself from a heresy prosecution by suggesting that "they are capable of unlimited expansion." It is as meaningless a "suggestion" as "expanding" twice two and making it a thousand.

The Ripon Diocesan Centenary wants "a big forward movement" commencing with the building of twelve new churches. The "whole scheme," we are told, will cost £158,000—and no doubt the money will be got. These twelve churches, it seems, are vitally necessary "if new areas outside Leeds and elsewhere are not to be simply pagan." We see no objection whatever in allowing the new areas (and old ones) to remain "pagan." The money could be spent on something far better than building churches; and we wonder what the people who want help more than anybody else—the unemployed—think about this church-building. What good does it do *them*? Do they ever protest?

Catholics, no more than Protestants, seem very successful in converting Jews. The latest figures available is that out of 15 millions Jews in the world, about 1,700 are received by the Church every year, and Catholics are actually boasting about this paltry figure! Fr. Bonsirven, writing in a Jesuit review, admits that "during times of political insecurity Jewish conversions are greatly increased—though some of these are liable to fall back to their old faith later." This is delightful, Jews accepting Jesus as their Saviour in "times of political insecurity," which means when their lives and property are being menaced; but directly there is a little more security, then overboard goes Jesus. One would like to have definite figures as to the cost of each conversion. Dr. Claude Montefiore once gave, we think, £40,000 as the sum spent in England in one year, and two Jews converted!

What a difference of opinion exists as to the utility of the B.B.C. religious services! Fr. Sidney Welch, in an article in the *Cape Times*, considers "the broadcasting of religion to have no lasting utility." It seems that the chief drawbacks are that "few countries are as united in religious opinion as in politics," and that "from the broadcasting of religion emerges a tendency to give up all debatable questions, and eventually fosters a lazy and disinterested attitude." Moreover, Fr. Welch sees a danger that "broadcasting may even add another re-

ligious sect to the many existing." Still, he can have one consolation—religious transmissions "do not appeal," he admits, "to more than 2 per cent of the listeners." We are glad to get such an admission from the rev. gentleman. What a tribute to religious broadcasts—2 per cent of listeners!

We often wondered what the "sin against the Holy Ghost" was—that is, what it really was. So many sins have come under the heading. Our erudite Catholic editor must be authoritative and this is what he says:—

The "sin against the Holy Ghost," which will not be forgiven, either in this world or the next, is considered by St. Augustine to be the sin of final impenitence, i.e., the deliberate rejection of the last grace which God gives before death. But this terrible sin is prepared for by other sins against the Holy Ghost committed during one's lifetime, such as resisting the known truth, obstinacy in sin, etc.

It will be no consolation to him, however, to learn there must be millions of us committing this "terrible sin"—or sins—and, strangely enough, we are not in the least afraid.

We learn also from the same gentleman that "the most efficacious suffrage for the Souls in Purgatory is, the Holy Sacrifice of Mass and Holy Communion offered for them." Perhaps the efficacy is not so great if the Mass is not well paid for first.

Another point of interest. It seems that "a Catholic who marries in a registry office is *not* married in the eyes of the Church, and hence if he is subsequently divorced he is to that extent free in the eyes of the Church to contract another marriage." So a divorced Catholic *can* marry again in the Church under these conditions. But if the registry office marriage is no marriage in the eyes of the Church, then a divorce—in the eyes of the Church—is not necessary. Query, if a divorce was not obtained, would the Catholic be committing bigamy if he married again in the Church? Or could he contract a dozen marriages in a registry office and still—in the eyes of the Church—never commit bigamy?

Dr. Townley Lord writes with more sense than most Christians who generally assure us that the Golden Age was when the Church was the virtual ruler of the world. Mr. Lord truly says: "There is to-day a more enlightened conscience than ever there was. Even in our modern industrial unrest we find a greater concern for the human factor than we have ever known before" . . . "If we are wise enough to make allowances for the new world in which we are living, we shall find in modern youth a healthiness in mind that is very attractive." We believe this to be essentially true. But Dr. Lord's estimate is weakened by his totally unjustifiable claim that "Medieval Christianity founded universities and covered Europe with Gothic beauty." Medieval Christianity caused and maintained illiteracy wherever it had power. It had long ago destroyed pagan seats of learning without replacing them. Its art and beauty never reared their head until medieval religion began to be tinged with scepticism. Otherwise why Medieval? Christianity's most barren time was its first thousand years when Christianity was omnipotent in Europe.

"Why Jesus Died," is the title of a sermon by Dr. James Reid. We miss any sort of definite answer to the question. But there is plenty of meaningless talk of the usual pulpit diffuseness. "The Cross has not saved us till it has printed on us its own spirit . . . the marks of our loyalty are the prints of the nails, the mark of the cross." It is about as intelligible as saying that the Fireman holds you in the fire while he sticks postage stamps on your nose before dropping you down the fire-escape.

More Sick Room Jottings

I HAVE instituted a new era, and created a new calendar. Why not? The Christian Church—after several centuries—opened a new era with the birth of Jesus; Islam did the same, starting from an important event in the life of Mohammed. The men of the French Revolution took the year 1789, redated it "year one," and thus proclaimed to a greatly shocked world the belief that they were inaugurating an era of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. There have been many other outbreaks of calendar making, mostly expressive of man's incorrigible optimism with regard to the future, even though the past may afford small encouragement for his rose-coloured expectations.

So, almost unconsciously, I created a new calendar, dating everything from January 29 (before or after) this being the date on which I was snatched up, not by angels like Mahomet, but by two policemen, and carried *per ambulance* (not to heaven) but to the hospital. During my 67 years of existence I have spent an occasional day in bed, but then I could eat what I liked, drink what I liked, and generally do as I pleased. But on January 29 I began to make history for myself. For 23 days (I am writing this on February 21) I have been lying on my back, with orders not to move, living on a scandalously attenuated diet, "bossed" by kindly nurses, turned this way and that while one or another shoots something into me with a needle—and never misses the mark—the while ruled over by an awesome doctor, who appears twice daily, and issues his flats with the calm serenity of a deity conducting the administration of his own particular cosmos. And then, last item in this eventful catalogue, I find that for some considerable time, I shall have to walk through a world bristling with deliciously seductive drinks and "eats," and put most of them behind—instead of inside—me. Is there any cause for wonder that the world has become for me a place of "before" and "after"? For a long time I shall be counting things as belonging to the world before or the world after January 29. I am entitled to create a new calendar.

But I am getting better. I am having a more varied diet—and more of it—and on the 23rd day of the first month of the new era, I was permitted to get up for a little while. Meanwhile another decree has gone forth from "Him-who-must-be-obeyed." I have had to swallow what seemed like a mile or so of rubber tubing, with a perforated silver bulb at one end; then with a yard or so of the tube protruding from my mouth I was supplied with a huge bowl of skilly and commanded to swallow all of it, or as much of it as I could. And in order to while away the time, every quarter of an hour for over two hours, the sister or the nurse syringed up a tube full of my digestive juices, and ranged them in a row as though they were preparing a stall for the British Industries Fair. And this horrible concoction of silver bulb, rubber tubing and skilly some misguided medical humorist has called a test-meal! A meal!! Ye gods!!! What queer forms humour does take with some people!

There is more to come. I am to be tested and tried in various ways, and then if I live up to expectations—or live through the experiments—I may be told I can go home. But before that, and the next

stage of my queer experience reminds me of the bogus architect in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, whose stock-in-trade was a series of views of Salisbury Cathedral, from the East, the West, the North, and the South, etc., I am to have a series of X-ray photographs taken from different angles, and I expect to see them labelled, view of C.C. from the front, ditto from behind, ditto from top, ditto from the bottom, and so forth. I don't imagine for a moment I shall be shown these photographs (I appear to be regarded as a mere troublesome incident in the situation) but, bearing in mind that I shall have to swallow, or have injected, quantities of stuff that will make transparent parts opaque, I expect these photos will resemble a section of the Central London Tube railway in a state of severe congestion. In any case, I doubt if I shall recognize the photographs as being a correct picture of me. Then, if "He-who-must-be-obeyed" decides that he has done all he can think of, I shall be sent home, marked "Fragile, to be treated with care until further notice." In this way I shall exchange the tyranny of nurses and doctors for the tyranny of my domestic establishment. If I am anything of a prophet, I can foresee a revolution in the near future.

When I entered the hospital I was as near gone as it is possible to be without completing the course. Had the end come then, I was so weary, so weak from loss of blood, that I am sure I should have "passed out" without any other feeling than that of sinking softly, quietly, and thankfully to sleep. In a way I am glad to have had my conclusions concerning death, so often expressed by tongue and pen, verified. Death should carry for the dying no fear. It means nothing but ceasing to be. There is nothing to dread because there will be nothing to feel. As stout old John Dryden said in his translation of a small portion of Lucretius (What a pity he did not translate the whole of the *De Rerum Natura*!) "We shall not feel because we shall not be." It is a bad teaching that has impressed upon the world a fear of death, and so has developed cowardice when not even courage is required, but only understanding. But with even the victims of the teaching it is not *death* that is dreaded, but the continued *life*, with which people are threatened. There should be nothing ugly, nothing terrifying in death to those who are about to die. The loss involved in death is to the living, not to the dead; for there can be no sense of loss where consciousness is not. And dying cannot be a difficult thing seeing how easily and how inevitably we all accomplish it.

I was very sorry not to have been able to keep my engagements at Liverpool and at Birkenhead, and at the Annual Dinner of the Liverpool Branch. But I am very pleased that Mr. Rosetti, who was good enough to take my place, had an excellent meeting in the Picton Hall, and that the Dinner passed off very successfully. I have also to offer my regrets to my Glasgow and Leicester friends, and to the other places that I had arranged, or was arranging, to visit before the season closed. But for the present my first objective is the Conference. There is a great deal of work to be done in connexion with this, and with care I hope to be able to do all that is necessary, and by acting with some restraint to take a subdued part in the actual proceedings of the Conference, and also in the public demonstration that follows.

The Executive has kindly, and I think wisely, resolved to hold the Conference this year in London. I feel certain that the Branches which have invited

the Conference will gladly fall in with the suggestion. The Conference over, my next objective is the winter lecturing season. By going a little more careful than usual, I hope to get safely through this, and by the end of the winter of 1936-7 I ought to be back to my old form. I trust this roughly planned programme will prove to those who have sent me such kindly and considerate letters, that I am not unmindful of their solicitude, nor lacking in gratitude for it.

About these messages. I do not, as a rule, preserve letters, no matter from whom they come. But the expressions of concern for my health, of appreciation of what I have been able to do for the best of all causes, and the feeling of even affection displayed in my letters of the past three weeks have almost determined me to keep them for re-reading if ever I feel disheartened or discouraged. It would be an ill-return for such a display if I did not resolve to act on the advice given—to take all possible care, to venture no unnecessary risk, in order to get back to my normal form. In this matter the Latin motto, *Hasten slowly*, obviously indicates the wisest course. The Branches of the N.S.S. and all who have written me will please take this as all the acknowledgment I am able to give at present. I hope to show that their appreciation and the advice given has not been in vain.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE.

EDITORIAL

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Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ALLAN TURNER.—We are very pleased to hear that the reading of the *Freethinker* "converted" yourself, your sister and your mother.

H. MOSS.—Thanks for good wishes.

J. YETTRAN.—We are resuming writing for the "One and Only," and shall continue weekly, although there must be a little less rushing about for some time.

B. A. MILLICHAMP.—Right is your diagnosis. Thanks for advice, which so far as is possible we intend to follow. It looks as though—for a time—we shall realize the truth of what we have often said, namely, that living for Freethought is often much harder than dying for it.

JACK BARTON.—We hope that we have at least scratched our name in the Annals of Freethought, and trust that when we do quit this mortal scene, our departure will not be felt so heavily as you assume. But we expect to be kicking around for some time yet.

R. W. BOWMAN.—We have had very many letters dealing with Freemasonry and religion, but as they nearly all cover the same points, we have been compelled to make a selection.

P. FORREST.—The price of *Before the Great Silence* is 6s. net. In the "Sugar Plum" column of last week's *Freethinker*, the address of Mr. J. Avis is shown as 62 Woolman Street, this should read Road.

G. SPEED AND R. F. MACK.—Thanks for cuttings.

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

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

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.

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

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

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

One of the *Observer's* "Sayings of the Week," citing Mr. Registrar Friend, "There are quite a number of crooks who have the faces of bishops." Why not? Is not the symbol of a bishop a crook!

Which reminds one of Dean Swift's *mot* that all clergy of the Established Church in Ireland were disguised highwaymen. For, he explained, the English Government sends us always good, wise, and pious men to hold office in the Church. But they never arrived. So, Swift explained, it must be that on their way to Ireland they were waylaid by highwaymen, killed and the corpses hidden. Then the highwaymen donned the dress of the good, wise, and pious parsons, proceeded to Ireland and drew the salaries as long as they lived. So far as we are aware the theory was never disproved.

Two new volumes have just been added by Messrs. Watts and Co., to their "Thinker's Library," (price 15s. each) *Clearer Thinking*, by A. E. Mander, is not an essay in formal logic, it is something better, an essay illustrating common fallacies of thinking, with useful rules and hints for logical reasoning. There are few who will not find the volume stimulating, and the more "learned" reader may interest himself in detecting the few instances in which Mr. Mander himself may be caught tripping. The second volume, by Mr. Aldous Huxley, *Do What You Will*, is good right through. It is good when one agrees with, and we are inclined to say that it is better still when one does not agree with him. For then, in nearly every case, we found ourselves precipitated along courses of reflection that opened up some very extensive views. We spent two or three very pleasant hours on our "sick bed" with *Do What You Will*. We like best the essays on "Swift," "Pascal," "Francis and Gregory."

We also like Aldous very much better than Julian. We think Aldous has far more fundamental matter, and more courage in his thinking.

THIS IS HELL.

Body and soul will be together, each brimful of pain, thy soul sweating in its inmost pores drops of blood; and thy body, from head to foot, suffused with agony . . . thy pulse rattling at an enormous rate in agony; thy limbs cracking like the martyrs in the fire, and yet unburnt; . . . every nerve a string on which the devil shall ever play his diabolical tune of hell's unutterable lament. . . . If God be true, and the Bible be true, what I have said is the truth.—C. H. Spurgeon.

It is clear that the earliest Church Fathers did not use the books of the New Testament as sacred documents clothed with divine authority, but followed for the most part, at least till the middle of the second century, apostolic tradition orally transmitted.

The Accommodating Spirit

MUCH trouble has been experienced in making Heaven attractive to the general. The initial difficulty lies in that well-known expression that what is one man's meat is another man's poison. This accounts for the poverty of detail in the information revealed to us of the New Jerusalem. The playing of harps and the everlasting chorus of Moses and the Lamb make little appeal to those without music in their souls. A Christian pauper possessed of the elements of economic sense, fails to enthuse over the prospect of streets paved with gold, and even the hungry with a bias towards savouries remain unresponsive to the picture of a land flowing with milk and honey. This, in brief, is the reason why the place to which many were called but few were chosen, begged description. But no such dilemma surrounded that department of the Life Eternal to which Broad was the Way. Hell was unquestionably hot. Not unhearably hot, mark you, for Omnipotence, in his infinite mercy, had seen to it that our feeble bodies had to be refashioned so that the heat could be borne, and not for a few minutes or hours, but longer even than that leasehold period favoured by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, of nine hundred and ninety-nine years. To extreme hotness in perpetuity mankind registered a profound dislike. Men, women and children, black, white and yellow, gave the same reaction. Theologians noted it and traded upon it. They made the astounding claim of possessing the keys of Heaven and Hell, and found their clientele increase because of their effrontery. The key-holders attended the dying, and smeared them with holy grease to God's recipe. They called this larding, the sacrament of Extreme Unction. For these useful offices it has been known for cheques to be passed over, at the last dread scene of all, to the Key Holders, for although it is considered the height of bad form to suggest commercialism in a Christian Church, yet the fact remains that long before a famous slogan appeared on the walls of the Modern Babylon, the Churches made good play with the words: YOU WANT THE BEST SEATS. WE HAVE THEM. Hell being found to be the active ingredient, Heaven just faded out. It became simply "The other place." It was evident that Heaven need not be stressed. Hell had to be painted bad enough so that all would be anxious to escape from it, and, as a place of refuge, Heaven would serve. Any port in a storm!

Now life on earth can be attractive enough when there is a fair chance of getting some of one's own way; and the immortality that Jesus brought to light, to be acceptable, must in its turn, promise mankind some of the things it badly wants. For if the New Jerusalem be not roughly moulded to the Heart's Desire, mankind will cease yearning and start yawning. Now it is well known that Jesus brought something to light, for it was with this object that he decided to tread the well-worn pathway of the Saviour God. It was for this object that he was born of a virgin, was crucified, rose again the third day, descended into Hell, and the rest, just as many had done before him. And through this one pilgrimage only we obtained Light. We will allow the Very Rev. W. R. Matthews, the Dean of St. Paul's, to state the degree of illumination that ensued.*

Popular Christian belief has always been rather confused on the subject of the life beyond. At one time it seems to tell us that we go straight to heaven or hell immediately after death, while in the next breath it tells us that our fate will remain un-

decided until the last judgment and the end of the world. Possibly I shall shock some devout Christians if I say that we do not know what the conditions of the future life are.

We commend the Dean's candour. He even admits the dimness of the great Luminancy. He says further, that the New Testament does not speak of immortality but of resurrection, a thought which he rightly says "gives rise to most difficult speculations," for "We cannot suppose that the material particles of our present bodies will be collected together at the last day." But if the Bible countenances such a doctrine, what does it matter, from the Dean's first principles, what *he* supposes? Is the Bible not intended to teach him anything? The Dean seems to be either reading the Bible like the *Freethinker*, "as any other book," or making a Bible of his own. Quite a common pastime this last, for Ruskin many moons ago called attention to the fact that "no persons are so little likely to submit to a passage of Scripture not to their fancy, as those who are the most positive on the subject of its general inspiration."

The difficulties that surround the idea of resurrection are indeed tremendous, so tremendous in fact that it is not surprising that some play is made in the New Testament with the idea of a "spiritual" body. This accommodating spirit has, of course, its risks, but as a second string to one's bow it was useful in meeting obvious crude criticisms of the bodily resurrection. The risk taken is in disappointing the expectations of the man in the street, for he wants nothing but to live on as he is, but with the disagreeable things minimized or eliminated and the lollipops increased. One cannot in sweet reasonableness ask John Smith to put up with a hot hell if he is a bad boy or doctrinally unsound, and then ask him if he is good or doctrinally irreproachable to be fobbed off with ethereal lollipops. Jesus promised that his father would reward his followers and in good measure. One has little faith in the powers of John Smith as a logician, but to do him justice, he knows what constitutes a raw deal.

When Bluff King Hal took over, for no doubt excellent and profound reasons, the job of Defender of the Faith, it wouldn't have appeared to him a Faith worth defending if he had been told it eliminated the Flesh. In this matter he would not have stood alone. Yet the one clear Light that Jesus brought to bear upon the Holy Institution of Matrimony was that in Heaven there was neither marriage nor giving in marriage, a thought that has not appealed to many. Paul, of course, would be an exception, for to Paul the Christian Institution of Marriage in this world was only an objectionable last resort. Speaking generally a life as we know it, but much more agreeable, is the only life indefinitely extended that anyone wants. And, of course, for his cleverness in spotting the right sect the good believer expects a bonus of some kind, even if his "reasons" for choosing that sect are only that they shouted more, claimed more and displayed more pieces of scarlet. The Dean of St. Paul's holds out no hope for such a bonus, but then the Dean of St. Paul's is a cleric of exceptional parts. He still retains some pride in holding aloft his little feeble flickering torch of reason, and if a thing appears to him silly or unjust he is man enough to say so. Given a Christian with these attributes we can to some extent anticipate his arguments. He tells us some of the things he does not believe, and most of these things we could comfortably have guessed. He leaves on one side, for instance, "the flames and fantastic tortures with which the diseased imagination of men has embellished the picture." He wishes us "to pierce through the legends and superstitions and fancies which men have woven, and seize, if we can,

* *The Listener*, February 5, 1936.

the spiritual reality that they express." In some spiritual way he wishes us to accept all the attempts to picture both Heaven and Hell, although it must be said that he still believes Hell to be highly objectionable in a very real sense. And he also adds:—

But lest I should seem to be suggesting that the gates of heaven are closed to all who do not hold a correct creed, I would observe that there are many who love God though they do not believe that he exists and many are spiritually awakened who have only a perplexed idea of the Divine Spirit who works in them.

Of course, if there should be another life there will be enough of it to go round. Any intelligent man blessed with decency knows that, but there are many, unlike the Dean, who are unwilling to express it, for alas, Christianity is not yet recognized as another name for courtliness plus horse-sense, and tweaking the nose of the orthodox deities is not yet recognized as a proper pulpit pastime.

It is refreshing to read of a cleric who "puts on one side" the flames of Hell and other infamous beliefs. But there are many equally pious who will consider this plain presumption. They will appeal to their Church or to their Bible and ask for the Dean's Authority. They have indeed much to say that is cogent. The very fact that there are multitudes who will have nothing to do with a "spiritual" Hell or Heaven shows the folly of belief in Revelation. If the doctrine of Hell be true, said a liberal Victorian, then it should be written on every blade of grass. Such a happening may savour of excessive reiteration. It would not then even be conclusive to believers for the question would certainly arise as to whether some wicked devil were not responsible for it. But relative clarity on such a point would surely be useful. The poor unbeliever possessed of the perplexity with which the Lord has endowed him can surely be allowed to exercise it by marvelling at the equal perplexity shown on these elementary and surely important matters by the specially illuminated. The Dean may put on one side this, that and the other where "the diseased imaginations of men have embellished the picture," but it was to these diseased imaginations that Jesus knew he spoke, and by the way he spoke he knew he was strengthening and fastening upon men who needed enlightenment one of the most appalling dogmas which has ever taken root in the human mind.

T. H. ILSTON.

Freethought Anniversaries

GIORDANO BRUNO—FEBRUARY 17, 1600

"I HAVE fought; that is much—Victory is in the hands of fate. Be that as it may with me, this at least future ages will not deny of me—he the victor who may—that I did not fear to die, yielded to none of my fellows in constancy, and preferred a spirited death to a cowardly life."

These words were written by Giordano Bruno some years before his imprisonment. In after centuries men have noted their appropriateness.

Bruno was born at a time of change probably without equal in the world's history; changes in which he played the part of a hero.

For many centuries the accepted teaching of Church and Schoolmen regarding the Solar system was that the Earth was at the centre, sun, moon, and planets moved round it and, in the language of Moses, the stars also. Plato and after him, Aristotle, had taught that perfect motion was motion that was uniform and circular. To obtain this, Ptolemy and others imagined this earth to be at one end of a bar, to the other end of which was at-

tached, or rather, pivoted, a shorter bar which carried the planet round the earth and in the proper time. There was also a system of crystalline spheres with which it is not necessary to deal here; but we should notice how it all suited the Church. The finite earth, home of fallen man, sun, moon and stars at the disposal of man, spheres which told of a Finite Universe. But before we get this length Ptolemy A.D. 170, and others found that this elaborate system of "deferents" and "epicycles" would not account for the movements of the various bodies. Until the time of Copernicus, 1473-1543, no effort was made to develop a truer system. Pythagoras, 569-475 B.C., had said that the sphere was the most perfect of all figures, and that was settled for nearly 20 centuries. For nearly two thousand years the science of Astronomy was at a standstill; on the mere unsupported—because unsupported—assertion of one man.

The importance of the changes advocated by Copernicus has been greatly exaggerated. He proposed to put the centre of the earth's orbit in the centre of the Universe; to this centre he referred the movements of the planets. The sun he placed at a point near to this centre; the epicycles he retained. "You are not bound to accept my system as showing the actual motions, what we want is to be able to predict where a heavenly body will be at a given time." Of the truth of his system he gave no proof. There was none. But he gave us an Infinite Universe, as Bruno later pointed out.

Meanwhile the actual world was being enlarged; Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, Magellan, and many others, had, by the discoveries of the West Indies, the Americas, the Pacific Ocean and Islands doubled the size of the earth. And they, or some of them, had sailed round it. Copernicus died in 1543. His book is said to have been published, and the first copy put in his hands on the day of his death. He was a Catholic and a Priest. It is questioned if he made an observation at any time.

Giordano Bruno was born at Nola, a village near Naples, in 1548. He is said to have had a tremendous love for his birthplace, a love which, in part, was his undoing. His father was a soldier who, having been under one of the Philips of Spain, to which Naples then belonged, had his son baptized Fillipo. Of his mother nothing definite is known. Giordano is the name he took when he entered the Church. The district was near Mount Vesuvius; Bruno was as volcanic as the mountain, fiery in temper, restless beyond imagination. He seems to have been at all times a difficult man to get on with; he never suffered fools, gladly or otherwise; nor did those who paraded their stock of assumptions as settled truths get much toleration.

Bruno first comes definitely before us when he enters the Dominican Convent at Naples. He was about 12 years old, and where or how his life had been spent till then is not known. It is said that by then he had a strong feeling for Nature, an inquiring mind, in which there was already a germ of Freethought and more than a germ of Septicism. The governing classes of Naples were Spanish, which means cruel and oppressive. The result was the breeding in Bruno of an undying hatred for tyranny in all its forms. This, truly, was a strange candidate for the Monastic life and for Holy Orders; but there he was, there he took the various steps, and finally, in 1572—aged 24 years—he is a Priest! Galileo was then eight years and Kepler one year old. Neither the Renaissance nor the Reformation had spent themselves, but it was a bad time for lovers of Freedom; the Inquisition was busy, the counter-Reformation was active. Bruno was in trouble with his pastors and teachers when 18 years old and was reproved. At 28 years he was again in disagreement with his Church superiors; this time he fled. For the next sixteen years he was a wanderer, one who was hunted, in his native Italy, in France, Geneva, France again, England, where he had two years' freedom and happiness, France, Germany, where after living by writing, lecturing, correcting for the printers in Mainz, Marburg, Wittenburg, and Prague, he settled in Frankfurt. This was in 1590, and lasted about 2 years, including some weeks spent lecturing in Zurich. In Geneva and Wittenburg he had both the Lutheran and Calvinist forms of Protestantism in review, and found neither an improvement on the Papacy. In Oxford there was no

audience for one who was an uncompromising opponent of Aristotle and so there he failed. No wonder he described Oxford as "the widow of sound learning." After a period in Frankfurt he received an invitation to go to Venice from one Mocenigo, to act as his tutor and reader in philosophy. This man belonged to a family of ancient and noble lineage; but he was a decadent, the helpless tool of his Father Confessor. The temptation was a great one, Venice was an independent Republic, his parents were dead; but it was Italy, and so he accepted the invitation. The maddest act in his career!

He arrived in Venice in the early part of 1592. He paid several visits to Padua before quarrelling with his so-called Protector, but on May 22, 1592, he was arrested in Mocenigo's house, and on the following day he was removed to the prison of the Venetian Inquisition. Nearly eight years of life remained to this passionate lover of freedom; years that were to be spent in the dungeons of the Inquisition and end on the Campo di Fiora—Field of Flowers—at the stake and with fire and faggot.

His trial commenced on May 26. No time was lost, the old charge of 1576 was brought up. He said that when he was dealing with these matters he spoke as a Philosopher and not as a Theologian. For a period the trial went on from day to day; he was questioned regarding all his career abroad. He had had dealings with heretics? he had lectured in heretic countries? was it true that he had praised Queen Elizabeth? he had been presented to her? Apparently the spy system was such that even the pleasantries one utters on introduction were subject of report. He was asked about his philosophical creed. He believed in a Universe infinite in extent and infinite in consisting of innumerable worlds and systems. He was a Lucretian and not an Aristotelean. From day to day it goes on until, on July 30, he breaks down; he tells them that he "humbly asks pardon of the Lord God, and of your most illustrious tribunal," and if "life shall be granted, I promise to effect such a marked reformation of it, as shall recompense for the scandal I have given." How was this humiliation extracted from him? Was it by torture? Was it the devastating result of weeks of slow questioning, making the prisoner convict himself? No paper, no books, no visitors, no assistance, loss of all freedom. The story of his trial comes from the Prosecutor, who is also judge, and when confession could not be obtained, whether by torture or otherwise, the pen of the forger was at his service.

It is necessary to emphasize this here because the view has been put forward by Mr. A. W. Benn that Bruno's "submission at Venice has to be set against his martyrdom at Rome; and if there is nothing very censurable in his career as a wandering teacher, there is also nothing worthy of any particular respect." A tortured man's "submission" is to be "set against" his death at the stake! This, after having praised him for being first with the revolutionary inferences to be drawn from the Copernican theory. France was "too hot to hold him." Fearless in advocacy of his opinion . . . "inflexible in maintaining the infinity of inhabited worlds." Evidently Mr. Benn has a double, but sometimes they are alike.

After having made his submission, and before any judgment is given, the Roman Inquisition moves in the matter. This man is not a Venetian, his heresies were not committed there; he consorted with heretics at many places, he had attended their church services, better hand him over to us. The Inquisition at Venice was a Republican Court, some of the members were laymen, and did not at all times see eye to eye with the clerical members. But after a somewhat lengthy diplomatic correspondence he was handed over to Rome. It was wise to keep the Pope's favour, and Bruno was only a monk who set himself above his superiors. And in January, 1593, he is handed over, not to be heard again for six years.

In January, 1599, Bruno is brought before a congregation of sixteen Cardinals, and many others, lesser lights. The outstanding figure is Bellarmine, who afterwards prosecuted Galileo. This Cardinal had extracted eight heretical propositions from Bruno's writings. He (Bruno) was given time to prepare his answers, and on February 4 he makes another brief appearance before the

congregation. This time he is given forty days for further answer. There is no record of what answer he made, if any, but the Spring passes, Summer and Autumn come and go before, on the Winter Solstice, December 21, he is again in the public view. He had no wish or duty to recant, he had no knowledge of these subjects for recantation. He complained of the prison privations, and a committee was appointed to get him to abjure and to promise concessions. This also is a failure and at the end of the month he is again brought forward; this time he is addressed by the General of his order, and by the Procurator, but without avail. He cannot withdraw propositions he has never made.

On February 8, he is brought up for sentence. In the Palace of the Senior Cardinal the proceedings were long drawn out, his whole life gone over, his heresies detailed, his obstinacy, even when the affection of Holy Church was shown by her efforts to convince him of his error. His dress was taken off, the dress worn by heretics was put on, and he was handed over to the secular authorities to be punished as leniently as possible and "without the shedding of blood," the sanctimonious formula for the burning alive. When he heard his fate he turned to his judges, "I suspect you are more afraid to pronounce that sentence than I am to receive it." Eight days more in the dungeon, lest he should desire to recant!

February 17, 1600, brought the last scene of all. It was a Papal Jubilee Year, and there were more high dignitaries in Rome than ever before. Pilgrims from all parts of the world. As we say nowadays it would have been a fine gesture on the part of the Pope to have pardoned Bruno and released him; instead, Bruno is made a spectacle for a Roman holiday. Escorted by priests with crucifixes, and by armed soldiers this lonely and friendless man passes through the streets from the Governor's Prison to the Field of Flowers; jeered at and hooted; he rejects the crucifix offered to him, is fastened to the stake and so passes.

In his native town of Nola there is a statue erected by local authorities and citizens. In Rome, on June 9, 1889, there was another procession, this time of Freethinkers celebrating the Triumph of Giordano Bruno, men and women from all the civilized lands of the earth. Two hundred and eighty-nine years had elapsed, yet Bruno occupied a higher place in the history of human emancipation than ever before. A statue was unveiled, erected on the spot where he had been burned to death, paid for by the subscriptions of Freethinkers in all countries. It faces the Vatican as defiantly as did Bruno himself.

One of his biographers says that he was intended for the Army, but that it made no appeal to him. Certainly it wasn't courage that was lacking. Braver than Bruno never lived.

AUTOLYCCUS.

Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

ATHEISM AND FREEMASONRY

SIR,—In the *Freethinker* of February 9, page 94, Eleusis appears to be disappointed that no one has "rushed into print" on the question of "Masonry and Atheism," and I am tempted to add a voice to the "Screams of Silence" by suggesting that Eleusis may obtain some information from Rev. Robert Taylor's *Devil's Pulpit*.

On page 241 he will find the first lecture on Freemasonry, and there are three. Now I know that in some "intellectual quarters," it is considered, "quite the thing" to sneer at the Rev. R. Taylor's writings, but as he held very high office as a Freemason (page 265), it is probable that Eleusis may find an answer to the problem.

By the way, on page 250 we find reason to infer that Eleusis has taken his *nom de plume* from one of the Mysteries, of the Craft modelled upon the Mysteries of Isis and Osiris of Egypt.

I was proposed and rejected on the grounds that as an Atheist I was not eligible; this was in S. Africa in,

about, 1912. I did belong to a very Ancient Order, but owing to the strong Religious Influence which dominated that Order, I found I could not act the hypocrite, so just dropped out of it, very much against the wishes and advice of those friends I had made in the Order, which I believe has much in common with Freemasonry.

I know the Christian conscience is fairly elastic, but it's a new one on me to find the same remark applicable to an Atheist.

C. TUSON.

National Secular Society

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD FEBRUARY 20, 1936

MR. G. WOOD in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Quinton, A. C. Rosetti, Saphin, Tuson, Silvester, Ebury, Mrs. Quinton, Junr., Mrs. Grant, and the Secretary.

A letter was read from the President regretting his enforced absence, and assuring those present that he was making steady progress towards recovery, and hoped to be with them at the March meeting.

The meeting expressed its sympathy with the President in his illness, its hopes for his speedy recovery and return to activity, and its loyalty to the policy under which the affairs of the Society are conducted.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and accepted. The Financial Statement for the month was presented. New members were admitted to Bradford, Birmingham, South Shields, Plymouth, Birkenhead, Hetton, Leeds, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Bolton, North London, West London, West Ham Branches and the Parent Society.

Details concerning lecture arrangements at Liverpool, Birkenhead, Fulham, Glasgow and Blackburn were discussed and instructions given. Correspondence from the International Union of Freethinkers, Messrs. Brighton, Clifton, and matters concerning the Annual Conference were dealt with. A report of the Annual Dinner was before the meeting, and a date suggested for the Dinner of 1937. The question of Summer propaganda was discussed and adjourned until next meeting.

It was agreed that the next meeting be held on Thursday, March 26, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,

General Secretary.

Society News

THE February meeting of the West Ham Branch was the Annual Meeting; and was the most pleasing for some years. The Balance Sheet showed a satisfactory position financially, especially in view of the work done during the year. Mr. F. G. Warner, Secretary, gave a brief report of the year's work, emphasizing the courses of lectures given in Leyton, the good sale of literature, and new members obtained. The last ranged from a lady over 80 years of age, formerly a member in another Branch, to the young and energetic round about the twenties.

Apart from the business, the chief topic of consideration was the sudden illness of our President and Editor. To us, then, it appeared even more serious than it was; and all hoped that he would be able soon to carry on his life-work in his own unrivalled way.

The Branch Officers were unanimously re-elected: President, H. Stewart Wishart; Vice-President, Mrs. E. Venton; Secretary, Mr. F. G. Warner; Literature, Mrs. Warner; and Auditors, Messrs. Venton and Greenhouse.

The Branch looks forward to another good year. Branch meetings are held on the first Thursday in each month, at the Locomotive Men's Hall, 62 Forest Lane, E.15; and all members are invited to attend.

Obituary

MRS. MAUD INGERSOLL PROBASCO

WE record with the deepest regret the death of Mrs. Maud Ingersoll Probasco, the last surviving daughter of Colonel Ingersoll. She was, we believe a regular reader of this journal, and we received an extremely appreciative letter from her on the publication of the sketch of her illustrious father contained in our *Bradlaugh and Ingersoll*.—C.C.

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, Mr. P. J. Hand—"Is Rationalism Reasonable?"

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, Professor J. C. Flugel, D.Sc.—"A Mad World, My Masters."

STUDY CIRCLE (68 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): 8.0, Monday, March 5, Mr. P. Goldman—"Some Theistic Arguments Examined."

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Earlham Hall, Earlham Grove, Forest Gate): 7.0, Saturday, February 29, A Social. Admission Free.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (The Labour Rooms, 70 Grange Park Road, Leyton, E.10): 7.30, Ivor Greenhouse—"Christianity Ancient and Modern."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.): 7.30, Mrs. Taylor—"Christianity Has Succeeded."

COUNTRY

INDOOR

BIRKENHEAD (Wirral) BRANCH N.S.S. (Beechcroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane, Birkenhead): 7.0, A Lecture.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Shakespeare Rooms, Edmund Street, Birmingham): 7.30, Mr. C. H. Smith—"Fundamentalism, its Foundations." And "What are the Peculiar People?"

BLACKBURN BRANCH N.S.S. (Cobden Hall, Cort Street, Blackburn): 7.0, Mr. J. Avis (Blackpool)—"The Factors of Heredity."

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Tavern Hotel, Godwin Street, Bradford): 7.15, Mr. M. Klines, B.Sc.—"Modern Scientists and Religion."

BRIGHTON BRANCH N.S.S. (164 Elm Grove, The Labour Institute): 7.30, Mr. J. C. Keast—"Is Christianity True?"

BURNLEY WOOD LABOUR CLUB: 7.0, Mr. J. Clayton—"The Birth of the Soul."

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"The Myth Theory" No. 2.

EDINBURGH BRANCH N.S.S. (Free Gardeners' Hall, Picardy Place): 7.0, Debate—"Has Christianity Proved Itself?" *Affir.*: Mr. A. Clark. *Neg.*: Mr. F. C. Penson.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, Councillor R. T. White—"Jesus Christ."

HETTON (Club Hall): 8.0, Wednesday, March 4, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Fifty-Fifth Anniversary of the Opening of the Secular Hall. Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner and special programme.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Cooper's Hall, 12 Shaw Street, Liverpool): 7.0, Sam Cohen (Manchester)—"Britain Without Gods."

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N.S.S. (Labour Hall, Laygate): 7.30, Wednesday, March 4, A Lecture.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Green Street, Sunderland): 7.0, Sunday, March 1, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

The Secular Society, Ltd.

CHAIRMAN: CHAPMAN COHEN

Company Limited by Guarantee.

Registered Office: 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Secretary: R. H. ROSETTI.

THIS Society was formed in 1898 to afford legal security to the acquisition and application of funds for Secular purposes. The Memorandum of Association sets forth that the Society's Objects are:—To promote the principle that human conduct should be based upon natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action. To promote freedom of enquiry. To promote universal Secular Education. To promote the complete secularization of the State, etc. And to do all such lawful things as are conducive to such objects. Also to have, hold, receive, and retain any sums of money paid, given, devised, or bequeathed by any person, and to employ the same for any of the purposes of the Society.

Members pay an entrance fee of ten shillings, and a subsequent yearly subscription of five shillings.

The liability of members is limited to £1, in case the Society should ever be wound up.

All who join the Society participate in the control of its business and the trusteeship of its resources. It is expressly provided in the Articles of Association that no member, as such, shall derive any sort of profit from the Society, either by way of dividend, bonus, or interest.

The Society's affairs are managed by an elected Board of Directors, one-third of whom retire (by ballot), each year, but are eligible for re-election.

Friends desiring to benefit the Society are invited to make donations, or to insert a bequest in the Society's favour in their wills. The now historic decision of the House of Lords in *re Bowman and Others v. the Secular Society, Limited*, in 1917, a verbatim report of which may be obtained from its publishers, the Pioneer Press, or from the Secretary, makes it quite impossible to set aside such bequests.

A Form of Bequest.—The following is a sufficient form of bequest for insertion in the wills of testators:—

I give and bequeath to the Secular Society, Limited, the sum of £ free from Legacy Duty, and I direct that a receipt signed by two members of the Board of the said Society and the Secretary thereof shall be a good discharge to my Executors for the said Legacy.

It is advisable, but not necessary, that the Secretary should be formally notified of such bequests, as wills sometimes get lost or mislaid. A form of membership, with full particulars, will be sent on application to the Secretary, R. H. ROSETTI, 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

FOR SALE—The *Freethinker* (Bound) from Volume I to 1916; in excellent condition.—Offers to Mrs. WALTER, 5 Broughton Avenue, Finchley, London, N.3.

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