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

Views and Opinions

More About Blasphemy

WHEN Christians were genuine in their professed belief, and fearless in their intolerance, blasphemy meant disbelief in God—the Christian's God. But with the greater socialization and humanization of men and women, a more elastic interpretation was given, until Blasphemy finally became merely an avowal of disbelief expressed in an improper form. But the question of what was proper and what was improper introduced many difficulties, and an attempt to define blasphemy in a more satisfactory manner was made by Lord Chief Justice Coleridge in the trial of G. W. Foote in 1883. Coleridge laid it down, and other judges have followed him, that the very fundamentals of religion might be questioned provided the "decencies of controversy" were observed. Although this decision was hailed as a step forward, and actually formed the foundation upon which was based the Secular Society, Limited, the judgment was a confused one, for several reasons, and represented the attempt of an able and liberal man to limit Christian intolerance rather than to give a logical reading of the law.

To begin with neither the Statute nor the Common Law of blasphemy aims at guarding the fundamentals of religion. There was no period in the history of this country when one could not safely have "blasphemed" the god of some religion or have blasphemed the doctrines of a religion other than those of Christianity. Even to-day there is no danger whatever, so far as the Blasphemy Law is concerned, of holding up the religion of the Jew, or the Mohammedan, or the Hindoo to ridicule, or of ignoring the "decencies of controversies" in connexion therewith. It is Christianity that is protected by law, and, strictly, that form of Christianity formulated by the Church of England. Other forms of Christianity are protected only so far as they are implied by Church

of England teaching. That is a point generally ignored in trials for blasphemy.

* * *

Decencies of Controversy

But what is meant by "decencies of controversy"? The only reasonable meaning to be attached to the phrase is the application of such rules as apply to controversy in questions of science, ethics, or politics. In all such subjects, sarcasm, irony, ridicule, and denunciation are quite commonly used, and no one dreams of ruling them out, still less of asking that their use should be prohibited. But with religion it is the use of ridicule and sarcasm that, at present, is held to constitute the very essence of blasphemy. The general rules governing controversy do not apply. Not so long ago, during the period that Mr. Ramsay Macdonald was under the impression that he was actually Prime Minister, more ridicule, sarcasm, and invective, were poured out on him than I can remember having been the case with any previous Prime Minister. But no one seriously complained that the "decencies of controversy" had been outraged or suggested that the use of such forms of speech should be visited with imprisonment.

The "decencies of controversy" thus turns out to be a sheer verbalism. It offers no guide whatever, for the reason that the rules which apply to controversy in general do not apply to religious discussions. A Freethinker, in discussing religion, deals with this subject as he deals with others; and as a consequence, he may find himself charged under a special Christian law, brought before a Christian jury, and sent to a prison where he will find all varieties of Christians well represented. But in all blasphemy trials—at least in recent times—the main point turns on the use of ridicule, and this makes the phrase "decencies of controversy," almost grotesque as a working rule. For ridicule is, and has been, in common use even among religious controversialists from the time that Elijah chaffed the prophets of Baal. Indeed, it is only within very recent times that blasphemy has been made to turn upon ridicule.

The reason for this is worth examining. I believe that the fundamental argument for this dread of ridicule is the growing doubt among Christians of the truth of their religion. In medieval times, when Christianity was sincere in its absurdity (or absurd in its sincerity, whichever one prefers), not merely was the weapon of ridicule in common use as between Christian bodies, but many of the "blasphemous" jokes now used, and many of the illustrations and expressions that are now denounced by Christians, had their origin with men of whose genuine Christian belief there could be no doubt. When an Edinburgh clergyman, who had offered a prayer for a gentle wind, found that his prayer was answered by a strong breeze that sent his

manuscript all over the Church, exclaimed, "I asked you, O Lord, for a gentle lispng wind, but a wind like this is damned nonsensical," he was trying to be neither humorous nor blasphemous. It was simple religious sincerity addressing a deity of whose existence and nature no doubt existed. Or take the case of earthquakes. Once upon a time, these were advertised by the Churches as unmistakable evidence of God's anger with man, and an example of His power. But I am quite sure that if I were to publish an illustration of the shattered homes and bodies that follow an earthquake, and were to head the picture, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way His Wonders to Perform," that would be denounced as grossly blasphemous, and there might follow a demand for a prosecution. Or if I were to take from an old Bible I have, an illustration showing God as a bewhiskered old gentleman surrounded by carpenter's and mason's tools creating the world, of God walking round with a lantern, before he had created the sun, or dividing the light from the darkness by pushing a black cloud on one side of him and a light coloured cloud on the other, such a cartoon would also be called blasphemous. I should be infringing the "decencies of controversy." Why this change in outlook? Is it not that in the earlier centuries the belief in Christianity, ridiculous as it was, at least was sincere. To-day, Christianity is a pseudo-belief. People no longer believe, they merely believe they believe, and to laugh at religion breaks the pretence. Ridicule is the acid test of shams and impostures that have outgrown the natural term of their life.

Lead under the Scales

There is yet one more peculiarity of the law against blasphemy to be noted. Arbitration is recognized in principle at law. Recourse to it is laid down in some Acts, and in the case of a judge one may say that he sits to arbitrate between two claimants, whether a claimant is asking for punishment to be inflicted on some one, or is asking for damages for injury done. And the great thing about the whole situation, whether the person involved is a judge or an official arbitrator, is that he shall be strictly impartial. Over and over again it happens that a judge who has very strong opinions about some matter on which a case turns, declines to act; and if a jurymen were known to have very strong opinions before the case was heard, he would be dismissed from the jury. But in a blasphemy case the prejudice, the existence of an opinion strongly against the accused, is not merely there, it is sometimes openly avowed. (The former editor of this journal was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment for blasphemy by a judge whose bigotry was pronounced and obvious to all). The jury is always composed of Christians. (It is astonishing with so many Freethinkers about, how carefully "providence" sees to it that none of them gets on the jury). The judge is almost always a Christian. The witnesses for the prosecution are Christians. The Counsel for the prosecution usually affects a belief in Christianity. And the judge, the jury, the witnesses and the Counsel between them have to decide whether the unfortunate Freethinker has criticized their religion in a way that meets with their approval!

Could one imagine a greater travesty of justice than this, or a more complete setting on one side of those rules and safeguards which are believed to secure justice in other connexions? Would a jury of Roman Catholics decide that Protestants had criticized their religion in a way that they thought fit and proper? Did the High Priests of Jerusalem believe that Jesus Christ criticized their religious beliefs in a manner that observed the decencies of controversy?

The law against blasphemy is devised to give the Christian a special measure of protection such as is given to no one else. In a blasphemy case the trial is ended before it is commenced. The verdict is given before the evidence is heard. Judge and jury are interested parties in the case, and their interest is wholly and irrevocably against the person accused of the offence. The Germany of to-day offers no greater travesty of justice than does that of a judge and jury—all Christians—being called upon to decide whether the prisoner at the bar ought to be permitted to attack their religion.

A Cowardly Evasion

Only one other point need be noted. During the hearing of the Bowman case in the House of Lords, it was said, and the statement was recently repeated by the Dean of Durham, that the Common Law against Blasphemy is fundamentally based on the theory that in certain circumstances an attack on religion may lead to a breach of the peace. There is some kind of legal justification for the plea, but this is itself an unconscious indictment of religion. I remember one judge, Mr. Justice Phillimore, saying during his summing-up of a blasphemy case, that the jury must bear in mind that people felt strongly about religion, and when they heard their religion attacked in a particular manner, they were likely to take the law into their own hands. The judge was addressing a Christian jury and no "back-chat" was permitted. Otherwise the statement might have been met with the retort that religion is the only thing that needs a special measure of protection, because men cannot even discuss it with the same level-headedness that they can discuss other matters, and that the law, instead of trying to raise religious discussions to the same level of decency that other subjects have reached, treats it as though it must always remain on the level of stark barbarism.

But there is already a police law against the utterance of language calculated to provoke a breach of the peace; there is already a law against the uttering of indecent or abusive language in public. Why will not these laws suffice for the control of religious discussions?

The truth is that the plea of a threatened breach of the peace is a mere pretence. There has never been introduced in any trial for blasphemy evidence that a breach of the peace had either actually occurred or that it was imminent. To pretend, as did the Dean of Durham, that blasphemy laws are to-day merely safeguards against a breach of the peace is to use the lie of the law in order to uphold the lie of religion. There is only one reason for the creation of a law against blasphemy and this derives from that primitive state when men believed that to offend the gods was to risk tribal welfare. To-day the blasphemy laws stand as a survival from a barbaric past, and as the bulwark of threatened religious and other vested interests. Their maintenance is an insult to intelligence and an outrage on justice.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Probably no man of this century has suffered more and more severely, both in person and reputation from bigotry than Percy Bysshe Shelley. Florence to the living Dante was not more cruelly unjust than England to the living Shelley. Only nearly forty years after his death, do we begin to discern his true glory. It is well that this glory is such as can afford to wait for recognition; that it is one of the permanent stars of heaven, not a rocket to be mined by a night of storm or rain.

James Thomson (B.V.) 1860.

Bowdlerizing the Bible

"All we now call super-normal is merely the normal imperfectly understood, but destined to be understood as knowledge widens."—Wells.

"Lay incompetence is the foundation of Priestcraft."
J. M. Robertson.

In the eighteenth century Peter Annet, a schoolmaster, published a provocative book, entitled *The History of the Man After God's Own Heart*, and he found Biblical criticism a very difficult and most unprofitable proceeding. He was soon in trouble. For publishing the *Free Inquirer*, he was brought before the King's Bench and sentenced to one month's imprisonment in Newgate, to stand twice in the pillory with a label "For Blasphemy," then to have a year's hard labour at Bridewell, and to find sureties for his good behaviour during the rest of his life. It is related that a woman, seeing poor Annet in the pillory, said: "Gracious! pilloried for blasphemy. Why, don't we all blaspheme every day?" Since the old schoolmaster was pilloried and persecuted the Christian priests have lost much of their power, and to-day ecclesiastics have to admit that the old Freethinker was right in describing David's lurid career as being very open to criticism.

The post-war period, which the Christian clergy said was to lead to a great revival of religion, has been a singularly trying time for all the Churches of Christendom. They have lost hosts of members, revenue, and reputation. The rising generation has much less respect for Priestcraft than their immediate predecessors. Hence the clergy are beginning to get really frightened at the bleak prospect facing them, and, with characteristic effrontery, are trying to make their Oriental religion more attractive than formerly to their innocent congregations.

The Church of England, which has the support of Parliament, and which has more to lose than its rivals, has been quick to act. And the curious thing is that the ecclesiastics of that State-supported Church have been compelled to adopt the very opinions for which poor Peter Annet was prosecuted many generations earlier. Not long since the Convocation of Canterbury decided, by forty-three votes against thirteen, to delete Psalm 58 from the Prayer-Book Psalter, and "King David" is to share the fate of many Kings in exile.

Now what is wrong with this particular psalm? The clergy say that it is "un-Christian in character," which is a polite admission that Peter Annet, and many other Freethinkers, were quite right when they pointed out that David was a bandit, and that some of the psalms attributed to him were in harmony with his uncivilized character.

The worst thing in Psalm 58 is the tender wish that the righteous "shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked," but, it should be noted, that similar gentle expressions may be found in other so-called sacred lyrics. Psalm 137 says: "Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones"; and Psalm 109 breaks out: "Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg; let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places."

This ruse of the Anglican clergy is a smart one, even for them, but it will not serve for long. The Psalms are an integral part of the Christian Bible, and "King David," the man after God's own heart, is too closely allied with the legendary figure of Christ to be thrown thus rudely to the rubbish-heap without the most disastrous results to Christian Orthodoxy. It is not only a desperate policy in the particular instance, but a precedent which will exert, in the long

run, anything but a happy effect upon the whole Christian position.

Humanism is a comparatively new thing in Europe. In most respects it is the most decided advance in morality known for very many centuries. There have always been kind-hearted individuals, but mass morality moves but slowly. Men were hanged, drawn, and quartered as late as the eighteenth century. The last public execution was in 1868. Torture persists in European prisons to-day. English people are the kindest in the world. Our philanthropies prove it beyond cavil and dispute, and our legal system, with all its faults, is the envy and admiration of other nations.

Yet the "Holy Scripture" of our people is in direct conflict with the kindly nature of our countrymen. It is full of barbarism from cover to cover, from title to colophon. From the barbarism and cruelties in the Pentateuch to the nightmare of the Book of Revelation, much of the writing clashes with our modern ideas of civilization. As for the much-vaunted New Testament, which is supposed to override the barbarities of the Old, the highly evolved moral perceptions of to-day are shocked beyond expression at the truly awful doctrine that the majority of the human race will suffer eternal punishment. On examination it will be seen that it is not theology which purifies and refines humanity, but actually humanity which reforms theology. Man civilizes himself first, and then civilizes his gods, and the priests walk at the very tail of the procession and take the credit and the cash.

This very artful priestly decision to bowdlerize "God's Word" is not a paltry matter. It is an open confession that the clergy are getting ashamed of their fetish-book, on which their bread-and-butter depends. This particular Bible occupies an extraordinary position among books. It is stamped as "God's Word" by Act of Parliament. It is forced, including all its barbarities and cruelties, into the hands of little children at schools. It is used as a fetish-book for swearing upon in Courts of Law and Houses of Legislation. Men and women have been robbed of their own children in its name, and excluded from public positions. And people are still liable, at law, to penalties for bringing it into disbelief and contempt.

Yet it is quite plain that the clergy are becoming very much ashamed of this book. In their confusion they are tearing pages out of the sacred volume. At present, it is true, the process is confined to the Psalms, but there is much more that is objectionable throughout the sacred volume. It is only a question of time before the Christian clergy will have to consider the question of the barbarous ethics of the Old and New Testaments in relation to modern humanistic thought. For this Christian Bible, crammed with out-of-date ideas, is forced into the hands of children, and decent parents will not for ever consent to have their little ones' intellects clouded and their characters degraded by the uncivilized teaching of a book, of which the priests themselves are now ashamed and apologetic. And holding the ethical and intellectual welfare of children so cheaply, how can these priests reverence education itself? It is no less than George Meredith who reminds us that "our souls grow up to the light; we must keep our eyes on the light and look no lower."

MIMNERMUS.

The believers in Cosmic Purpose make much of our supposed intelligence, but their writings make one doubt it.—Bertrand Russell.

Things Worth Knowing*

XXXIII.

THE BIAS OF PATRIOTISM

"OUR country, right or wrong," is a sentiment not unfrequently expressed. . . . Whoever entertains such a sentiment has not that equilibrium of feeling required for dealing scientifically with social phenomena. To see how things stand, apart from personal and national interests, is essential before there can be reached those balanced judgments respecting the course of human affairs in general, which constitute Sociology. To be convinced of this, it needs but to take a case remote from our own. Ask how the members of an aboriginal tribe regard that tide of civilization which sweeps them away. Ask what the North-American Indians said about the spread of the white man over their territory, or what the ancient Britons thought of the invasions which dispossessed them of England. . . . Admitting the truth so easily perceived in these cases, we must admit that only in proportion as we emancipate ourselves from the bias of patriotism, and consider our society as one among many having their histories and their futures . . . shall we recognize those sociological truths which have nothing to do with particular nations or particular races.

. . . Patriotism is nationally that which egotism is to individuality—has, in fact, the same root; and along with kindred benefits brings kindred evils. Estimation of one's society is a reflex of self-estimation; and assertion of one's society's claims is an indirect assertion of one's own claims as a part of it. The pride a citizen feels in a national achievement, is a pride in belonging to a nation capable of that achievement; the belonging to such a nation having the tacit implication that in himself there exists the superiority of nature displayed. . . . As, lately, we saw that a duly-adjusted egoism is essential, so now, we may see that a duly-adjusted patriotism is essential. Self-regard in excess produces two classes of evils; by prompting undue assertion of personal claims it breeds aggression and antagonism; and by creating undue estimation of personal powers it excites futile efforts that end in catastrophes. Deficient self-regard produces two opposite classes of evils; by not asserting personal claims, it invites aggression, so fostering selfishness in others, and by not adequately valuing personal powers it causes a falling short of attainable benefits.

. . . Here we come upon one of the many ways in which the corporate conscience proves itself less developed than the individual conscience. For while excess of egoism is everywhere regarded as a fault, excess of patriotism is nowhere regarded as a fault. A man who recognizes his own errors of conduct and his own deficiencies of faculty shows a trait of character considered praiseworthy; but to admit that our doings towards other nations have been wrong is reprobated as unpatriotic. Defending the acts of another people with whom we have a difference seems to most citizens something like treason; and they use offensive comparisons concerning birds and their nests, by way of condemning those who ascribe misconduct to our own people rather than to the people with whom we are at variance. . . . Judge, then, how seriously the patriotic bias, thus perverting

our judgments about international actions, necessarily perverts our judgments about the characters of other societies, and so vitiates sociological conclusions.

. . . Like the one-sidedness shown within our own society by the remembrance among Protestants of Roman Catholic cruelties only, and by the remembrance among Roman Catholics of Protestant cruelties only, is the one-sidedness shown in the traditions preserved by each nation concerning the barbarities of nations to be fought with. As in old times the Normans, vindictive themselves, were shocked at the vindictiveness of the English when driven to bay; so in recent times the French have enlarged on the atrocities committed by Spanish guerillas and the Russians on the atrocities the Circassians perpetrated. In this conflict between the views of those who commit savage acts, and the views of those on whom they are committed, we clearly perceive the bias of patriotism where both sides are aliens; but we fail to perceive it when we ourselves are concerned as actors. Everyone old enough remembers the reprobation vented here when the French in Algiers dealt so cruelly with Arabs who refused to submit, lighting fires at the mouths of caves in which they had taken refuge; but we do not see a like barbarity in deeds of our own in India, such as the executing a group of rebel sepoy by fusilade, and then setting fire to the heap of them because they were not all dead, or in the wholesale shootings and burnings of houses after the suppression of the Jamaica insurrection. Listen to what is said about such deeds in our own colonies, and you will find that habitually they are said to have been justified by the necessities of the case. Listen to what is said about such deeds when other nations are guilty of them, and you will find that the same persons indignantly declare that no alleged necessities could form such a justification. . . . We read with glowing admiration of the successful rising of an oppressed race; but admiration is changed into indignation if the race is held down by ourselves. We can see nothing but crime in the endeavour of the Hindoos to throw off the yoke; and we recognize no excuse for the efforts of the Irish to establish their independent nationality. We entirely ignore the fact that the motives are in all such cases the same, and are to be judged apart from results.

A bias which thus vitiates even the perceptions of physical appearances, which immediately distorts the beliefs about conspicuous antagonists and their deeds, which leads us to reprobate when others commit them, severities and cruelties, we applaud when committed by our own agents, and which makes us regard acts of intrinsically the same kind as wrong or right according as they are, or are not, directed against ourselves, is a bias which inevitably perverts our sociological ideas. The institutions of a despised people cannot be judged with fairness; and if, as often happens, the contempt is unwarranted, or but partially warranted, such value as their institutions have will certainly be underestimated. When antagonism has bred hatred towards another nation, and has consequently bred a desire to justify the hatred by ascribing hateful characters to members of that nation, it inevitably happens that the political arrangements under which they live, the religion they profess, and the habits peculiar to them become associated in thought with these hateful characters—become themselves hateful, and cannot therefore have their natures studied with the calmness required by science.

. . . . The general truth that by incorporation in his Society, the citizen is in a measure incapacitated for estimating rightly its characters and actions in relation to those of other societies, has been made abundantly manifest. And it has been made mani-

* 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.

fest, also, that when he strives to emancipate himself from these influences of race and country, and locality, which warp his judgment, he is apt to have his judgment warped in the opposite direction. From the perihelion of patriotism he is carried to the aphelion of anti-patriotism, and is almost certain to form views that are more or less eccentric, instead of circular, all-sided balanced views.

Partial escape from this difficulty is promised by basing our sociological conclusions chiefly on comparisons made among other societies—excluding our own. . . . Discounting our conclusions as well as we may, to allow for the errors we are thus led into, we must leave the entire elimination of such errors to a future in which the decreasing antagonisms of societies will go along with decreasing intensities of these sentiments.

The Study of Sociology (1873),
by HERBERT SPENCER, Chapter 9.

Gerald Massey

THERE have been many essays written showing the pre-Christian character of the Christian mythology, but none have been written of a more comprehensive and a more damning character than the one that is here presented to the public. The parallels are precise and deadly, and they leave upon the mind of the candid reader the conviction that whatever may be the ultimate derivation of Christianity, and whatever other sources may have contributed to its totality, the Christian mythology is derived directly, in its main features, from the older mythology of Egypt. The story told is so plain that no Christian has ventured disproof of it, and it may safely be said that none will do so. A safer plan, and the usual one adopted with direct attacks, is to remain silent. That does at least avert an extensive advertisement of the fraud that has for so long been perpetuated on the world.

It says little for the knowledge the world possesses of those who strive for its enlightenment that not one in a thousand is to-day acquainted with the name of Gerald Massey, and not one in ten thousand is acquainted with his works. Yet his was a life that for single-hearted devotion to truth would be difficult to excel. Born over a century ago, 1828, the son of a bargeman, the early age of eight found him working in a mill for the sum of about one shilling and sixpence per week, which the Christian masters of the day thought adequate payment for the child sacrifice that was being offered to their greed of gain. At fifteen he came to London, and there, by hook or by crook, managed to get hold of some books, and so to acquire some sort of an education. Ruskin once wrote to him, "Your education was a terrible one, but mine was worse." Ruskin meant that, but while he had all that money could buy, Massey knew what it was to want, so while there is doubtless some truth in a statement of that kind, one fancies that the sentiment outweighs the fact.

But some education Massey did acquire, and even gained a knowledge of the ancient Egyptian language, and so placed his great work on the basis of a first hand acquaintance with the facts with which he was dealing. He threw himself heart and soul into the advanced movements of his day, editing one revolutionary journal and contributing to others. Always looking at life with the eye of a poet, he very early published verses, which at a later date were collected and published in two volumes under the title of *My Lyrical Life*. His literary work brought him the notice of many distinguished men, among them Walter Savage Landor, of all persons the one least likely to flatter or dispense idle praise. He also became a regular contributor to the *Quarterly Review*, the *Athenæum* and other magazines and newspapers.

But his great work, the work he would have put in the forefront of all he did, was his researches into the mythology of ancient Egypt and its connexion with the Christian religion. For forty years he pursued a close study of the remains of old Egypt, and the results of

that life study are given to the world in his monumental works, *The Natural Genesis*, the *Book of the Beginnings*, and *Ancient Egypt, the Light of the World*. These works are published in six volumes, quarto, and cover nearly 4,000 pages. They are bulky in size but easy in the reading, and one must assume that it is their size, together with their price, that has kept them unknown to all but the comparative few. And, of course, it was not to the interests of the established religion to do aught that would get these works, with their indictment of Christianity, known to the world.

So far as the religions of the world are concerned the theory put forward in the works above-named may be divided into two parts. The first part is concerned with the origin and nature of mythologies, the second with the relation of the Christian and the Egyptian mythologies. In dealing with the first Massey cuts clean across the theories favoured by modern anthropologists. Not that he favours any theory of supernaturalism; his is a purely naturalistic explanation, but it is not that adopted by Tylor, Spencer, or Frazer. According to this school of writers religious ideas have their origin in the fact of primitive mankind reading itself into nature. When man gave natural forces a living form he really believed that the forces around him were akin to himself. He personified nature and explained it in terms of himself.

Massey offers another explanation of the same facts. It is quite true, he says, that primitive man expressed the operation of natural forces in terms of living beings, but that was not because he believed these forces to be really similar to himself, he lacked altogether the mental richness that would have enabled him to do so. To him these forces were superhuman, not supernatural, but something more powerful than the human.

The powers first perceived in external nature were not only unlike the human, they were very emphatically and distinctly more than human, and, therefore, could not be adequately expressed by features recognizable as merely human. Primitive men were all too abjectly helpless in the presence of these powers to think of them or to conceive them in their own similitude. The one primordial and most definite fact of the whole matter was the distinct and absolute unlikeness to themselves. Also, they themselves were too little the cause of anything by the work of their own hands to enter into the sphere of causation mentally. . . . The human being could only impress his own image on external nature in proportion to his mastery over natural condition.

It was this mental poverty of primitive man, combined with an equally pronounced poverty of language, that, in Massey's opinion, led to the attempt to represent natural forces by means of signs. Mythology thus commences not "as an explanation of natural phenomena, but by such representation, such primitive means as were available at the time." It was a primitive sign-language, and "sign-language was from the beginning a substitution of similars for the expression by primitive or pre-verbal man, who followed the animals in making audible sounds accompanied and emphasized by human gestures." Thus, in picturing the destructive forces of nature,—

they imaged the most potent of devouring beasts, most cunning of reptiles, most powerful birds of prey. . . . They were adopted as primitive Ideographs. They were adopted for use and consciously stamped for their representative value, not ignorantly worshipped; and thus they became coins, as it were, in the current medium of exchange for the expression of primitive thought or feeling.

We are not now concerned with whether this be a sound theory or an unsound one, and so far as the essay which follows is concerned it does not matter one way or the other. Massey's next step is that we have in the mythology of ancient Egypt a record of this primitive sign-language exalted into a system of conscious symbology, and forming a religion, or "Ancient Wisdom," and that, again, is not material to the essay which is here reprinted. For at this point we are not concerned with the inner meaning of the Egyptian mythology, but with a series of historical parallels, although it may be here noted that it is part of Massey's case that it was the ignorance and rascality of the primitive Christian com-

mentators which brought the whole matter into confusion by attempting to give an historical basis to a system that was never anything but frankly mythological.

It is at this point that Massey's attack on Christianity really commences, and whether derived directly from Egypt or not, and there is no need to confuse the issue by making unnecessary assumptions, the fact that the whole of the Christian story, from the immaculate conception to the resurrection, is to be seen complete in every detail, is enough to demonstrate the fraudulent character of the New Testament story. From that point of view Massey's indictment is absolutely conclusive. The attentive reader of the following essay will find little fault with a comment of Massey's in the early part of his *Ancient Egypt* :—

Christian capacity for believing the impossible in nature is unparalleled in any time past amongst any race of men. Christian readers denounce the primitive realities of the mythical representation as puerile indeed, and yet their own realities alleged to be eternal, from the fall of Adam to the redemption by means of a crucified Jew, are little or nothing more than the shadows of these primitive simplicities of an earlier time. It will yet be seen that the culmination of credulity, the meanest emasculation of mental manhood, the densest obscuration of the inward light of nature, the completest imbecility of shut-eyed belief, the nearest approach to a total and eternal eclipse of common sense have been attained beyond all chance of competition by the victims of the Christian creeds.

A man who spoke in this manner was not likely to receive consideration at the hands of Christians. And against all who offend in this priest-ridden country—for we are not the less priest-ridden because the same clergy are not in power as are in power elsewhere—there is the penalty of oblivion, so far as it can be achieved. The real history of reform for more than a hundred years is the record of men who have slaved and worked on behalf of the people and yet with whose names the people of to-day are practically unacquainted. Orthodox and unofficial histories pass them over in silence, and many who would do them justice if they only knew them, by taking their information from these tainted sources repeat the injustice and perpetuate it. In this way the work of the reformer is gradually forgotten, his name passes from the memory of men, and they who are in the direct line of his persecutors assume the credit for the work he did.

Gerald Massey lived and died a poor man. His was not the kind of labour for which the world pays in cash, but in the hard coin of abuse and misrepresentation. The works that he gave to the world meant many years of privation to himself and to his family. That, however, is a form of which the world under the influence of an egoistic Christianity thinks little, and even counts a man a fool for enduring. His books could have brought him in but little, even if they provided anything at all. For a few years before he died he was granted a small sum from the civil list, but at his death that was discontinued. The British Government, ready to squander thousands of millions on war, and many thousands on stupid royal excursions round the world, could not afford to continue, although asked to do so, the small pension to his aged widow and to his daughter. That is the gratitude the world shows to its benefactors.

C.C.

(Preface to *Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ*, by GERALD MASSEY.)

Word over all, beautiful as the sky!

Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost;

That the hands of the sisters Death and Night, incessantly softly wash again and ever again this soil'd world:

. . . For my enemy is dead—a man as divine as myself is dead;

I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin—I draw near;

I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

Walt Whitman.

Acid Drops

The new Minister of Defence is Sir Thomas Inskip, up to recently Attorney-General. He is a very eminent Christian. Religion is, indeed, one of the passions of his life. Also he is a very strict Sabbatarian. In the latter capacity, and as President of the Lord's Day Observance Society, he denounced Sunday entertainments as sapping the morality and strength of England. As Attorney-General he piloted through the Commons the Bill permitting Sunday Cinemas. Professes a great faith in freedom—and was a strong supporter of the Incitement to Disaffection Act. As a good Christian he believes in turning one cheek when the other is smitten, so may be expected to at least prohibit battles and war manœuvres on Sunday. Also, as a Christian, and as one who believes in rendering obedience to the powers that be, he is expected to obey without question the orders of Mr. Baldwin, and never to act as a rival to him for leadership.

The Bishop of London calculated that during the past 50 years he has saved £10,000 by not drinking or smoking. The Bishop ought to congratulate himself on the good friends who placed a man of his talents in a position to earn even that much in half a century. We cannot think of any ordinary profession or trade where he would have been able to earn £4 per week. The Bishop concludes with "you have to have a clear brain" to hold such a job as his. "A clear brain"! The proviso does not seem very obvious. Perhaps it is a new plea for the miraculous.

In the *Sunday Chronicle* Mr. Beverley Nichols continues his flatulent nonsense which clots itself round his visit to the Holy Land. This week's selected gem is concerned with his visit to the Sea of Galilee. He ate three fishes from the Sea of Galilee. This reminded him that Jesus fed five thousand people with a few fishes similar to those he was eating. This made him feel that he was in a country "where a man feels near His Maker." We are waiting for Mr. Nichols to bring home a bottle of the darkness that came over the land at the crucifixion. Probably Mr. Nichols might justify himself with the old saw "A man must live!" On the other hand, the necessity is not so very obvious to ordinary folk. Mr. Nichols is also outraged that every place connected with Jesus has been commercialized. Well, but everyone cannot be writing for Sunday papers. And other people may also feel they must get a living somehow.

The other day the B.R.C. undertook to broadcast a ghost hunt. This was not intended as comic entertainment, nor did it turn out to be even amusing, it was merely supremely silly. In an alleged haunted house, Mr. Harry Price, the well known ghost hunter, accompanied by the inevitable Mr. Joad—who manages to get some publicity out of this kind of thing—with a few others, gathered together. They had all sorts of traps and appliances, and, of course no ghost came. But we are certain of one thing, and that is that every believer in ghosts would have his or her faith in them strengthened. In all probability those who took part in these ridiculous proceedings had some kind of faith in ghosts, or they would not have been there. We wonder when grown up men will cease these ridiculous hunts? Mark they do not go to explode a myth or expose a fraud, they go to see whether this particular ghost will materialize or not. If their aim is to kill superstition, we can only say that they are going the worst possible way about the job. For our part we would not go across the road to meet the best ghost that ever filled a newspaper paragraph or caused the muddled head of a country yokel, or the equally muddled head of a newspaper "philosopher" to wag in terror or wonderment. On the other hand, if anyone has a well built, conveniently situated haunted house, which he cannot let, we are ready to take it rent free, and we guarantee that no ghost will trouble it while we are there.

While Mr. Price and Co., were hunting spirits in one place, the Rev. T. L. Barlow Westerdale told a congregation at Portland Place Methodist Chapel, that he had

been struggling with spirits in odd corners until he was exhausted and fell down in a swoon in the street. We can assure Mr. Westerdale that we have heard of many such cases, and that some to whom this experience has been granted have held a high place in the Christian roll of saints and martyrs and religious leaders. Others, with exactly similar experiences have been confined in asylums or derided by the public at large. It appears to be a question of time, place and environment.

A Committee of Church men and women and the Bishop of Kensington arranged a "service of Penitence" at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, the other evening. It was held because of the "injustice, neglect, and hardness of heart at this time." It is difficult to express adequately what any sane person must feel for people who can take part in such a futile exhibition of superstition and credulity. The idea that the "cruelty and injustice" which certainly can be found all over the world may cease because of such a "service," or that "God" will or can do anything to prevent the "hardness of heart," is simply infantile nonsense. Has "God," or Christian prayer, stopped the Italians from bombing Abyssinian women and babes—to say nothing of bombing the courageous "savages" attempting to hold back the Christian invader with bows and arrows?

This is the kind of thing which was said at the service by such a Church dignitary as the Dean of St. Paul's:—

We and our fathers before us have sinned, and because of sins and shortcomings Mammon rules the ways of men, and Christ is crucified anew in slums. . . . Remember not our offences, O Lord, nor take Thou vengeance on us for that we remain patient of hatred, greed and cruelty. . . .

What a picture—that of intelligent men and women listening to this drivel—and all the more drivel because it is put into that special form of awful English which is supposed to be "religious." Fancy people nowadays listening patiently to a Dean imploring "Our Lord" not to take "vengeance" on us! Is it not nauseating?

The unanimous vote of the National Assembly in Portugal has restored "the Crucifix in every classroom in all primary schools, and is one of the reforms of the Portuguese Public Instruction Ministry."

The new law orders the Crucifix to be placed over the teachers' chair as the symbol of Christian education determined by the Constitution.

This should prove to Freethinkers that the fight has not yet been won. The Catholic Church is still a formidable and tireless enemy.

The *Methodist Recorder* has its own pet Professor. He is Dr. T. M. Lowry of Cambridge University. Prof. Lowry is frank enough to admit that his "own personal religion has been influenced far more by my Methodist ancestry and training than by the profession in which my life has been spent." Such candour is disarming and highly creditable. Dr. Lowry severely condemns "what is sometimes called 'special Providence.'" But this is surely to condemn all personal prayer for individual benefit! Nearly every prayer is a petition asking for a "special Providence" to intervene on behalf of self and family. Even the Lord's Prayer, commended by Dr. Lowry, "Give us this day our daily bread" comes under a similar ban, unless the petitioner adds "And leave me out of it if you can't supply everybody else too." A famous preacher once satirized the average man's prayer thus:—

Bless me Jesus all my life,
Bless my wife, my son, HIS wife,
Bless our family, just us four—
Me and them—that's all—no more.

Dr. Mande Royden is quoted in the *Christian World* as saying: "I am sufficient of a Christian to believe that God would not bring people into the world if there was not sufficient for them to eat." We should like to see

the Divine Statistics to know on what basis God "provides." Christ, if our memory serves us, was under the impression that five small loaves and a couple of fishes was a meal for five thousand hungry men (besides women and children).

Dr. W. B. Selbie is within his rights in recommending his hearers to say, "Thy Will, not mine, be done." But how can he claim that such a very quietist denial of self and submission to another's will is, as he says, "at once a guide in life and an incentive to action"? A believer unwilling to come between God and His Will, is surely unlikely to be goaded into action when an Omnipotent God is "carrying on." Man's abject petition to God to do as He likes can be no "incentive to action." It is Man's will, not God's, which spurs us to help our fellows to accomplish human salvation.

The Rev. C. F. Andrews has come all the way from India to teach his fellow-Christians (*inter alia*) how to pray. A crowd of Christians (apparently sick to death of Mr. Andrews' monotonous harping on one sole topic) begged him, he says: "Don't talk about India, but teach us to pray." Accordingly he preaches. But he gets no farther than to repeat Christ's promise that "Ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." But presumably Mr. Andrews was expected to say something different. The "old stuff" has been tried and has always failed. If ten per cent of Christ's promises had been fulfilled prayer would be the most popular amusement of the day.

Although Ireland is the Church's brightest jewel, all is not quite so well in her eyes as she would like to see in the green isle. For example, Alderman Byrne, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, has been complaining "of the lack of corporate or individual Catholic consciousness among Irish professional men; and of organization there was none." In blunt words this means that the educated Irishman was actually ignoring the Catholic religion, a very disquieting fact. Alderman Byrne also pointed out that though "the legal profession in Ireland had contributed many of its most brilliant men to politics," there were very few "for Catholic action." Perhaps the Alderman and his Catholic friends are beginning to note that while you can fool some people all the time, and all the people, some of the time, you can't fool all the people all the time.

If America does not recover prosperity it will not be because of the lack of suitable prayers. The National Committee for Religion and Welfare Activity has been called into being, and as it consists of Catholics, Protestants and Jews, we cannot see God turning a deaf ear to their pious supplications. Bishop Manning represented the Anglicans at the inaugural dinner, Dr. Cashin, the Catholics, Mr. W. Green spoke for the Baptists and Rabbi Pool for the Jews. President Roosevelt sent his best wishes and "God speed," and altogether it was a thoroughly unified religious meeting. The only thing now one has to wait for is the result; and God will be welcomed much more fervently if he puts America back into big and successful business again. But what will everybody say if he doesn't?

The poverty of the myriads to-day seems completely ignored when armaments, the burial of monarchs, or the building of churches are under consideration. A little church in a little suburb near Croydon need not fear the threats of destitution which are a menace to millions of human beings. Mrs. J. A. Rank, in laying the foundation stone of a totally needless addition to the most over-built of all structures, a new Church (at Kenley), was able to announce that £6,000 had already been raised, and that a few more thousands would soon wipe out the total cost of this wastefulness.

Canon W. E. S. Holland, at a Missionary Conference, slightly overdid the appeal for Christian propaganda amongst the Untouchables of India. He assured his

audience that these unhappy people were "flocking into the Kingdom" (i.e., joining Christian churches), but that they "know nothing of their own religion and still less of Christianity." We quite appreciate the subtle suggestion that nobody would ever join either religion, of course, if they knew anything about its history, its teaching or its results. Canon Holland must have an uncommon sense of humour when he draws attention to the easily understood phenomenon that "the Church at home is not turning eager people away, only the church overseas has to do that." The result, if not the aim, of Christian missions, may be to provide an asylum for the clergy when their own civilization discards the religion by which they flourish—at present.

We rather think that Mr. (ought we to say the Reverend?) Thomas Magnay, M.P., has missed his vocation. As a Member of Parliament he seems to be a fanatical religionist. He describes the Prayers with which Parliament is opened. He tells us how glorious it is to "have Religion and Politics fitly joined together." He quite unnecessarily quotes the Sixty-seventh Psalm—the apparently essential part of the pious performance of the priest in Parliament. Mr. Magnay summarizes the unctious mixture as "God reigns, Justice is done, Plenty abounds, to the amazement of all unbelievers." It is not only amazing, it is the optimism of self-deception to believe that perfection exists and is the result of parliamentary prayers. Mr. Magnay claims that we ought first of all to get (his) religion: "Then and not until then" ought we to think about good government. This is one of the reasons why we do not get good government.

The Rev. Leslie Weatherhead discussed, the other day, the "terrifying fear of death"—as if he were quite unaware that no religion ever instilled the fear of death to such an extent as Christianity. Its priests and parsons painted Hell whenever they had the chance in the most "horrific" terms; and Christian artists vied with each other to give the tortures and torments which everybody but the most fervent Christians would have to undergo, stark and ghastly realism. It is true that, nowadays, people like Mr. Weatherhead are no longer anxious to paint the terrors of hell quite so explicitly as used to be done when the world had more Christianity and less common sense; but it must make a Freethinker smile when he finds them anxious to show now that Christianity really robs men and women of the fear of death.

Of course, Mr. Weatherhead believes, as a good Christian should, in survival, but he is very vague as to what this actually means. As Jesus Christ is "one of the greatest religious geniuses the world has ever known," what he says must be true. So when Jesus "turned to a thief dying by his side and said, 'To-day you will be with me in the world of spirits'" (both the A.V. and the R.V. say "in Paradise")—that proves without question there is a world of spirits. And Mr. Weatherhead adds, "Jesus spoke with authority and, putting it at its lowest, it is the opinion of the expert on his own subject." Well, of course, if Jesus was "God," and lived in "Heaven," and had legions of "Angels," then he certainly was an "expert." All now Mr. Weatherhead has to do is to *prove* these things instead of merely saying them.

Finally, if "heaven" or "survival" really is the place Jesus, or Swedenborg or Sir A. C. Doyle describes is it not terror enough? Does anyone seriously wish to live in a "Paradise" with "angels," and fools like Peter, for example? May the Lord save us from such a fate!

Archbishop Hinsley is in an awful state of horror. It seems that 25 per cent of the Catholic children in his diocese "are being educated in non-Catholic schools." It is a wonder that "our Lord" does not send some mighty legions of angels with flaming swords to end such iniquity. The Archbishop is determined to put a

stop to such an awful state of affairs, and is commencing with a call "to his people for prayer and self-sacrifice." But as he knows quite well that prayers alone won't stop anything he is launching a "campaign for £100,000" as a central fund for building new schools. This is as it should be; let Catholics build their own schools and pay for the teaching. Whether the children will be "educated"—as they admittedly are in non-Catholic schools—is another question. But cannot they and most people see that the only just solution of the problem as far as the State is concerned is Secular Education?

At a meeting of the Westminster Branch of the Catholic Evidence Guild, the other day, many speakers emphasized the "value of the Catholic Press to the Church," and added that even "the spiritual and temporal lives of non-Catholics" would be enriched by reading it. The descriptions of the hopeless credulity and superstition of Catholics all over the world are a feature of the Catholic Press; and it would be interesting to know how they can be of any value whatever to an ordinary person. Grovelling before a statue or a bishop or some "saintly" "relic" may, and possibly does "enrich" the life of a Catholic. But who else? We can safely leave the "enrichment" to Catholics and Catholic converts. They need it.

Another martyr has recorded his name for ever in the book of God in Heaven. A juror in Dublin refused to swear on a Bible unless it was printed in Irish. A hasty search was made when it was discovered that the only Bible in Irish was a heretical Protestant one! It is a wonder that the juror did not faint with horror. A "legal" authority thought the juror could have sworn on a Latin Bible, as it was the official language of the Church. But then a purist might here argue that Jesus knew no Latin, and that "Our Lord" might have protested against the Church adopting a language so utterly unlike Greek or Aramaic or whatever language he spoke. We wonder whether the juror has ever soiled his mouth with the "alien" English language at all. Perhaps he thinks that if only the truth were known, Jesus spoke in pure Irish—which is probably as true as any other theory.

The *Church Times* claims that the war against Christianity in Germany "derives what philosophy it has from Haeckel and Nietzsche," and at the same time adds that "the Nazis want back the old German tradition and old German gods." We are surprised that a paper like the *Church Times* can couple the work of Haeckel and Nietzsche with any gods, pagan or otherwise. They both were not merely anti-Christian, but anti the god-idea altogether. Ludendorf and Rosenberg want to bring back to Germany Wodin and the old German deities, and one can imagine the scorn Nietzsche would have poured on them in his most strenuous days. It is not merely Christianity that the Freethinker is fighting; it is the god-idea in any shape or form. And that was the position of both Haeckel and Nietzsche.

More light on Prayer! A Mr. T. Wigley tells us in the *Methodist Recorder* that it is bad taste, to put it mildly, to pray to God for something you don't want! "God doesn't like that kind of prayer. If you don't want a thing don't pray for it." The Almighty must be getting almighty particular. The Church Prayer Book prays for lots of things nobody really wants. Who cares for instance on whether God "illuminates all bishops, priests and deacons," or "endures all the nobility with grace, wisdom and understanding"? And a writer in the *British Weekly* practically tells us to go as we please in our prayers: "fortunately," says Prof. Findlay, "God can sort our prayers out" for Himself. He must have a good bit of "sorting-out" to do anyway, so long as all kinds of ideas, in all sorts of languages, from every variety of mutually antagonistic sects "float up" to what Tennyson calls "the Wintry Skies!"

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

W. A. WILLIAMS.—Thanks for cutting. We are taking every possible care in order to get back to normal health as soon as possible. And we look like doing so.

G. F. LAWS.—The story of Bradlaugh and Moody the evangelist is like most of the missionary stories, just a Christian lie. It is curious how most people take it for granted that preachers shall lie—at least we do not recall anyone of them being reprimanded for doing so, and no Christian seems to think the worse of his preacher for doing it.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S.—Mr. Cohen gratefully acknowledges the good wishes of the Branch for his recovery, and regrets that his accident prevented his visiting the town as he had hoped to do. Perhaps next winter.

H. JAMES.—Few men can do all they would like to do for Freethought, but most men can do something. Not to be able to do what one would wish is a very bad reason for not doing anything at all.

A. J. D.—Sorry unable to use MSS.

H. MURPHY.—Many thanks for cuttings.

FOR Advertising and Distributing the *Freethinker*.—W. Sandford, 5s.; H. Hunter, £1; F. C. Pensom, 9s.; Don Fisher, 3s.

F. W. J. MEALOR.—We are very flattered by what you say concerning our influence on yourself and others. We hope we deserve some of the good things at least.

CINE CERE.—Very pleased to have your letter. No apology was needed, so long as each does what he or she can the cause benefits. We intend exercising all possible care until we are completely recovered.

MRS. B. COWARD.—Mr. Cohen very much appreciates the kind message of yourself and the members of the Preston Branch. He is glad to learn of the success of the Branch's efforts.

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. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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

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

Mr. Cohen still receives many letters enquiring about his health, and congratulating him on his recovery. He desires to assure all that he is feeling quite well, although he has for some time to move with care. And he is going to take a holiday in order to see that the period of convalescence is as short as possible. But his pen will be as busy as ever. The care need only extend to less running about and to diet. On the latter point he has had shoals of excellent advice, which he has carefully filed for future reference—when required.

We beg to remind Branches and individual members of the N.S.S. that Resolutions that are intended for the Annual Conference must be sent in at once. The Conference will take place in London on Whit-Sunday, May 31.

The financial year of the National Secular Society closes on March 31, and all subscriptions from members of the Parent Society, and Branch dues, not already forwarded should be sent in to the General Secretary before that date for inclusion in the Annual Balance Sheet.

An appreciative notice of Mr. Cohen's *Humanity and War* appears in the *Bebington News* for March 7. We are glad to say that the pamphlet is still selling. We are obliged to those who have helped in the sales, and hope friends will continue to use it as a means of introducing general Freethought literature to their friends.

Gerald Massey's *Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ* has been out of print for some time, and a new edition has just been issued by the Secular Society, Limited. Massey's pamphlet, whatever opinion may be formed of his general theory of religion, provides one of the deadliest parallels of the close identity existing between the Egyptian myth and the New Testament legend. The parallels are not merely deadly, they are simple and distinct enough for a child to follow and appreciate. Those who are not acquainted with Massey's life will find a sketch by Mr. Cohen in this issue that will doubtless awaken a desire to know more of him. *The Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ* is issued at 6d. postage one penny extra. It is a valuable production for those interested in propaganda work, and indeed for all who are interested in the question of Christian origins.

It seems very difficult for many people to get the hang of the oath question. For instance, the *Bethnal Green News* says that:—

Neither Quakers nor Atheists have to take the oath in a court of law when giving evidence. Christians, however, are compelled to, and Jews take the oath on the Old Testament.

The real facts are that any one may claim to affirm on one of two grounds—on the ground of having no religious belief, or on the ground that the oath is contrary to one's religious belief. The judge, or other official who is presiding, has no right to do more than ask the one question "On what ground?" and then should take the affirmation. The affirmation is legal wherever the oath is usually taken. Further, any kind of oath, or any form of affirmation that is binding on the witness is good at law.

At the West London Branch, last Sunday, a crowded meeting assembled to hear a Debate which had been advertised between Mr. George Bedborough and a Mr. Oliver (of the British Israelite Federation). Without apology or explanation the B.I.F. man failed to put in an appearance. Mr. Bedborough lectured on the subject of the announced debate ("Is the Bible a Safe Guide?") The large audience expressed its gratification with the lecture, and its disgust at the unexplained truancy of the Man of God.

The North-East Federation of Branches has arranged a social evening for their members and friends for Saturday, March 21, in the Unitarian Assembly Hall, Bridge Street, Sunderland. Festivities commence at 7 p.m. The charge of one shilling will be made to cover expenses. All Freethinkers in the district are invited to attend for a jolly evening and a chance to renew old and form new acquaintances in the movement.

The heathen write that the comet may arise from natural causes, but God creates not one that does not foretoken a sure calamity.—*Luther*.

The Witch Mania

X.

THE question which must occur to anyone who studies the books about witchcraft, is whether behind it all was a religious cult of some kind. Were the ceremonies something definitely connected with a mysterious religion which had been handed down throughout the ages; or were the proceedings at a Sabbath or Esbat merely got up for the occasion with no definite ritual?

Miss Murray, whose two books on the subject, the *Witch Cult in Western Europe*, and the *God of the Witches*, should be read by all those interested in the question, definitely asserts that there was a genuine survival of a pagan religion obviously associated with fertility motives of some kind.

No one can doubt that some of the early pre-Christian religions were phallic. The sex element may, in the beginning, have been more or less "pure"—that is, the mystery of fertility in general was regarded in a reverent spirit. The worship undoubtedly degenerated later on, and the religious rites were made an excuse for sex orgies of all kinds. Priapus and Pan (they may have represented the same deity) became "garden" gods. They were set up, at all events, in gardens to look after the crops and fertility of both plants and animals. The story of the lascivious Pan always chasing nymphs is merely symbolical of human fertility. Pan was a horned god. He often has the legs of a goat, and the goat and the bull were undoubtedly connected with solar worship and the signs of the Zodiac.

Christianity had to make headway against a deep-rooted Paganism. It was impossible for many customs and ideas to be swept away in a generation or two, and no doubt, among the peasantry all over Europe for many centuries after Christianity was established, a great many customs and ideas belonging to pagan cults must have survived. Easter eggs and mistletoe do not belong to Christianity, yet they appear with every Good Friday and Christmas Day, and most Christians certainly believe they are part and parcel of their religion.

Informed Christian leaders do not believe this. A temporary peace was secured by Christianity absorbing the pagan rite. Even though Christ is called the Lamb of God, and the lamb was often portrayed on the Cross, the Church has fought against the idea because the lamb was a horned animal, and could easily be the symbol of Pan as well as of Jesus, and this would not do. Moreover, it was mostly in the guise of a goat—another horned animal—that the Devil used to appear at the Sabbath, with the result that the Church set to work to stamp out the pestilent heresy. The fight was a long one, but from the accounts handed down to us, it does seem as if many of the witches and sorcerers were as proud to belong to the cult of witchcraft as any Christian was to Christianity. Was there therefore a clear and distinct religion to which these people belonged?

The story of Jeanne d'Arc is particularly apt and interesting. It was as a witch she was tried and burnt. It is impossible to imagine that the charge was a trumped-up one. It is true that the English were beaten time and again in battles in which Jeanne took part, but she was eventually captured in a very paltry skirmish by the Burgundians and sold to the English. It is hard to believe that if the English wanted her executed because of their defeats they would have wasted any time in trying her for witchcraft.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that any accounts coming from purely ecclesiastical sources must be accepted with only the greatest reservation. The bias of Christian belief is open and without shame. Even when one feels that the victim is a charlatan, one must proceed warily where the accusation comes from Christian sources. And Miss Murray rightly complains over and over again, how often our information on certain events comes only from monks or monkish writers, and therefore very often from bitter enemies. In the case of Jeanne d'Arc, "one of the chief accusations against her, and one which she could not refute, was that she had dealings with the fairies." In Lorraine, the country of Jeanne, were "all kinds of magic, sorcery, witchcraft, auguries, superstitious writings, observations of days and months, prognostics drawn from the flight of birds or similar things, observation of the stars in order to judge of the destiny of persons born under certain constellations, the illusions of women who boast that they ride at night with Diana or with Herodias and a multitude of other women." It is indeed doubtful if Christianity had properly penetrated Lorraine; and from the various answers given by Jeanne to her accusers, Miss Murray deduces the theory that she belonged to the old pagan religion as well as to the Christian religion in some form. In fact, the Dauphin, "before accepting her, insisted that she should be examined by a body of learned doctors of the Church in order to ascertain if her mission had in it anything 'contrary to the Faith.' Had the whole country been Christian, as we are led to believe, such an examination would not have been thought of."

Moreover, Jeanne chose Gilles de Rais as her Marshal, and he was, as is well known, executed some years later also for witchcraft—or "Satanism." It is also pointed out that no attempt was made to ransom her after her capture—though both she and Gilles de Rais and even Charles were very wealthy. To capture some one of high rank meant a ransom to the captors, money not very willingly given up if there was a chance of obtaining it. Yet Jeanne was left for six months in the hands of the Burgundians and only then sold to the English.

In Delepierre's *Historic Doubts*, there is an account of Jeanne d'Arc not very acceptable to those who, in the words of Miss Murray, "pour floods of tearful sentiment over her, so that plain facts are not always welcome." It tries to show that there is very little proof that Jeanne was burnt after all, by the English. Of course, the sceptical habit may be carried too far; and as both France and the Catholic Church have canonized her, it takes a little courage to say bluntly that there is a great deal of evidence to show that Jeanne was alive for many years after the supposed execution. The difficulty in the case of the Maid is that we are entirely dependent on the church scribes for what happened, and many years elapsed between the trial at Rouen and the rehabilitation from which we get almost all our accounts of what occurred. Delepierre has marshalled the evidence which proves Jeanne to be alive, and with her brother in 1436 at Orleans (the date of the burning is given as 1431) where they were fêted—the bills for this feast still existing. In 1439, married to the Sieur des Armoises, she came again to Orleans with her brothers and was presented with money "for the help she gave the town during the siege." And there are many other proofs of Jeanne being seen and known years after 1431. It may be that this Jeanne is an impostor—it is impossible to say for certain. But the whole case bristles with uncertainties and extraordinary occurrences, further details of which can be read in the *God of the Witches* and Delepierre's *Historic Doubts*.

Miss Murray deals also with William Rufus, who

has been painted by the Church in infamous colours. The truth is that Rufus seems to have been an exceptionally fine King—"a dutiful son, an able and competent ruler, a faithful friend, a generous enemy, recklessly courageous, lavishly open-handed, and never known to break his word." But "he jeered openly at Christianity, delighting to set Jews and Christians to discuss the merits of their respective religions; he plundered churches and religious establishments, and openly declared that neither St. Peter nor any other saint had any influence with God. He also had the temerity to disbelieve in trial by ordeal." No wonder the Church hated him. Rufus may or may not have been "definitely a Pagan"; but it is good to learn that he disbelieved in the Christianity of his day.

I pointed out in a former article that, in the case of Gilles de Rais, an attempt has lately been made to rehabilitate him from the Christian charges which show him to be a monster of cruelty. In cases such as his, tried as they were before an ecclesiastical court, "witnesses for the defence were not admitted and the prisoner had no counsel. The accused was pre-judged and his fate was already decided before he was brought to trial."

Gilles de Rais was one of the ablest commanders of his day, and to him, far more than to Jeanne d'Arc, must the credit be given for the French victories against the English. He seems to have been also well read, for he collected a fine library; and he wrote the Mystery-Play of the Siege of Orleans. The accusations made later against him that he was an alchemist only prove that he also was interested in experimental science.

The charges against him included sodomy, invocation of spirits, divining, killing of innocents, apostasy from the faith—in fact, the usual ecclesiastical charges. And as the court "was almost entirely composed of priests," it is obvious that he had no chance from the very commencement of the trial. Moreover, "Gilles expressed his opinion in no measured terms, calling the priestly judges simoniacs and scoundrels, and saying that he would rather be hanged by the neck with a lace than submit to reply or to appear before such ecclesiastics and judges." Suddenly, however, Gilles changed his tone and confessed to all sorts of abominable crimes, including the murder of 800 children—a confession which rather staggered the only layman among his judges, and he obviously did not believe it. Miss Murray thinks that "the whole of Gilles' attitude towards his own death is inexplicable except on the hypothesis that he died for some cause which is not openly acknowledged." At all events, he was hanged. Yet five years afterwards, "the King issued a royal ordinance annulling Gilles' debts. In this document no word is breathed of any crimes or offences, mention is made only of his splendid military services."

Whether these three historic cases prove, as Miss Murray believes, the continued existence of a Pagan religion which found its expression in witchcraft and sorcery in the succeeding centuries, is a problem worthy to be further considered. I shall try in a final article to sum up some of the evidence.

H. CUTNER.

There may or may not be beings superior to us. But I cannot think so ill of any possible supreme being as to accuse him of the guilt and folly of the voluntary creation of such a world and of such lives as ours. I cannot accuse a possible Devil of this, much less a possible God.

James Thomson (B.V.)

The Wondrous Art of our Ancestors

THE artistic achievements of early man seem so advanced that their appearance has occasioned considerable speculation. While to the strictly scientific evolutionist it is traceable to purely natural causes, some contend that primitive art points clearly to spiritual inspiration. It is also urged that the theory of organic development in terms of Darwinian doctrine fails completely to explain the presence of an æsthetic sense in man. Yet, an appreciation of the ornate or beautiful is not confined to the human species as it is plainly displayed in the melodies and artistically constructed nests of the higher birds, while the pride of the peacock when displaying his train is patent to every beholder.

The earliest examples of man's workmanship that have come down to us are fragments of flint chipped in such a way as to render them more convenient in use. Prehistoric men fashioned flint to serve as axes, knives and other instruments for practical purposes, and long ages passed before they began to decorate or even polish these implements.

The most ancient specimens of pictorial or chiselled art were inspired by very mundane considerations. Salomon Reinach, Professor Elliot Smith, Mr. H. G. Sparing in his *Childhood of Art*, Mr. C. Burkitt, and other authorities, agree concerning this, for it appears that the men living in France and Spain during the later phases of the Palæolithic Period painted the animals they captured for food, firmly persuaded that these pictures gave them control over the animals themselves. As Elliot Smith suggests in his essay, *The Origin of Art*: "The making of lifelike representations of animals and other natural objects, created opportunities for the more intense study of form and colour and the means of giving expression to beauties and harmonies perhaps not consciously realized until the difficulties of reproducing them were overcome. Successful accomplishment brought a feeling of satisfaction to the artist, and an intenser interest in the technique of his craft."

The widely varying ideals of beauty entertained by different peoples are illustrated by Darwin in his *Descent of Man*. Art and emotion are ever associated and the unemotional seem utterly oblivious to æsthetic pleasure. The beauty of a landscape or the splendour of a sunset confers sensations of sublimity to the lover of art or poetry. Yet many, perhaps a majority, even in civilized communities, are largely irresponsive to the grandeur of the Alps, the charm of the English Lake District, the winding valley of the Wye or Tintern Abbey. Some there be who see no more in a glorious sunset or pensive afterglow than a cow as she rests chewing the cud after her repast, when facing the western sky.

Even among the truly artistic there is not and perhaps never will be, a uniform standard of excellence. The acrimonious diversity of opinion regarding Epstein's statuary, cubist art, or even jazz music serves to exemplify this truth. Ideals of feminine gracefulness and charm differ from land to land, and from time to time in the same community. In her able essay, *Pre-historic Art*, Dina Portway Dobson remarks that: "An English fashion-plate of to-day shows a figure of board-like slimmness, but the bulk of mankind has liked his ladies to be fat in reality as well as magically. We read in the fascinating volume of Messrs. Spencer and Gillen on the Australian aborigines of a set of damsels who went to the river to bathe, and, turning on one of their number, slew and devoured her. This act was performed from no mean motive

of personal dislike or animosity, nor from carnal greed, but was due to the fact that she was possessed in no ordinary degree, of the beauty of fatness, and this beauty her companions desired to incorporate in themselves, so that they too might abound."

The outstanding triumphs of cave art were those of Upper Palæolithic times. The extreme rigours of the Ice Age had relaxed, but conditions of a cold and moist character persisted. The temperate climate of Western Europe was yet to come, and the landscape was one of marsh and waste. In these untoward conditions man, who was then in the hunting and food gathering stage, sought warmth in caves and rock shelters. Much of his life was spent in enforced idleness, but his leisure hours were to some extent devoted to artistic effort.

Sympathetic magic—the belief that an outline or image of an object is so closely connected with its original that an injury inflicted on one is certain to occasion injury to the other—seems evident in many cave paintings. "Thus a drawing of a mammoth with an arrow through its heart would ensure the arrow of the hunter also finding its mark." This utilitarian beginning, led by imperceptible degrees to adornment for art's sake alone. For in a later phase tools and weapons in constant use became decorated with realistic representations of animals, and occasionally with geometrical and conventionalized designs. It appears probable that as the chief quarries of the prehistoric hunters were quadrupeds of considerable bulk such as the mammoth, wild oxen, mastodon and reindeer, their capture furnished food for the community which lasted some time. In the intervals of leisure thus afforded the hunters fashioned their bows, arrows and spears, chipped the stone implements they employed for multifarious uses, while the medicine man or sorcerer stole into the caverns with "his burin or graver, his bone palette of ochres, fats, and lamp-black, and his lamp to prepare for the next big magic."

Mr. M. C. Burkitt, the author of those standard volumes, *Prehistory*, and *Our Early Ancestors*, has traced five succeeding stages in cave art in the course of which there is clear evidence of a pronounced improvement, and then a steady decline in execution.

The intense realism of the cave paintings at once arrests the eye. The men who portrayed the animals they pursued had evidently observed them closely in life. Moreover, as they carved and skinned their prey they became familiar with their anatomical structure. Apparently these ancient hunters possessed no hatchets, and dismembered their captures with flint knives. Thus their practical knowledge of anatomy was acquired. One fine drawing depicts a feast, and in this a bison's head is splendidly shown. Its backbone remains bare after the hunters' repast, while the men themselves stand about in an attitude of repletion. The greater number of sketches are those of animals, and several species of deer, the mammoth, horse, wolf, cats, seals, birds and snakes appear, but very few plants are seen.

Dina Dobson praises the paintings of deer and bison, to which she awards the palm of beauty. "With the simple colours at his disposal," she writes, "the artist has worked so well that the creatures seem to be instinct with life. Not only are they portrayed correctly, but they really look like animals, not like pictures of animals or like a clever but untrained artist's painting. . . . They are the culminating work of a really artistic people, and the fruit of long experiment and much experience."

Among surviving races of the lower culture there are three whose artistry suggests that of the Stone Age. The South African Bushmen, a sadly reduced

remnant now restricted to a small territory, in earlier times led a nomadic and hunting life over very extensive areas of the continent. Their rock paintings and engravings of animal and human forms although deficient in the splendid artistry of Palæolithic man, nevertheless at once recall it to the mind. The Australian aborigines were also to some extent the creators of rude art, while in the distant north the Eskimo utilize small sketches on ivory as picture writing. "These little pictures," it is said, "are more sophisticated than those of Palæolithic man, for they tell a connected story, and so bear a message or send an appeal, but when seen side by side with the earlier work, no one can help feeling the resemblance, especially to some of the work from Southern Spain." The drawing of the human body, the striking movement and the correct representation of animals are so great that the species of whale depicted can be identified. Also the reindeer, pierced with arrows, is markedly reminiscent of early art, and it is suggested that the Eskimo may be descendants of cave dwellers who migrated northwards with the reindeer when warmer conditions returned to Western Europe.

With the ending of the Old Stone Age man probably endured many hardships, while his wits were sharpened in the struggle to live. The succeeding Neolithic Period was unfavourable to art, but it became the time of leading discoveries and inventions which made possible modern civilization. Animals were domesticated, hand-made pottery was produced, woven fabrics appeared, dwellings were erected, seas and rivers were navigated, and to crown all, the art of agriculture was established. Man ceased to be a wanderer and became permanently attached to the soil he cultivated.

T. F. PALMER.

The Intrusionists

EVERY religious believer is an absolutist. And an intrusionist. He is so convinced—at least he says so—of the inerrancy and indispensability of his creed that he seeks to justify his intrusions of it upon others by his professed concern for their eternal salvation and spiritual wellbeing. Thus we encounter, when we reach the years of discretion, a number of philosophical teachers, most of whom are intellectual bullies. They do not permit any questions as to the existence of the supernatural authority in which they believe, and which they claim to represent on earth. Such questions they aver can only be raised by persons essentially depraved, who have no appreciation of the sublime.

The first thing that occurs to the person who has been converted is the state of his neighbours. The duty he conceives is laid upon him of warning them against the "Wrath to come," and of enjoining them to embrace the faith which he has embraced. This conception of his duty is based upon the assumption that his creed is infallible, and that men can only be purified and elevated and made unselfish by obediently accepting it and walking according to its dictates.

If the pious intrusionist cannot get at you directly by personal contact, since you may have forbidden him access to your presence, he searches for other ways and means of getting at you—say by preaching at you in papers and magazines which you are known to read; by sending you lurid tracts through the post; by praying for you; by wayside gospel messages which shout at you from the hoardings you daily pass on your way to and from your work; and in these latter days by sermons through the B.B.C., if you happen

(as is likely) to have a radio set. The radio, according to him, is one of God's wonders; and therefore ought to be used primarily for the glory of God.

These are the ways in which the religious intrusionist seeks to save you if you happen to be a mere man in the street. The methods he uses with the adolescents who are training for the "learned professions" are more subtle. With them he deals much more in suggestion than in bald statement. "The humanities" which every young student is expected to study before he reads for his destined profession are well peppered with divinity and its assumptions. The wily religious intrusionists have got into the ground floors at any rate of most of the great Universities. They are just a continuation of what the young students experienced in the public schools, where the established faith is put forward to be accepted as the essential basis of all their future education. We need not be surprised that many Church dignitaries are gravely concerned about the "danger" of heterodoxy among teachers in the State schools. That will be but the insertion of a wedge—the beginning of the end—when the religious intrusionists will get the order of the boot. Purely secular education can only be the work of the devil. Once the instruction of youth passes wholly out of clerical control Heaven Help the Clergy!

In the ultimate resort, who can deny that if it were not for terrorism and threats of violence the supernatural hocus-pocus would go phut? It is all very well for the majority of modern preachers to proclaim insistently that God is Love. He may be that towards his sheep; but his attitude to heretics must necessarily be something very different. In fact God is Love so long as he is not crossed. Abjectly surrender your manhood to him; grovel before him; praise him continuously for his questionable wisdom and you are right. The Eternal Father beams upon you *then*. But if you should take a thought and begin to inquire why you should so humiliate yourself and degrade your manhood; if you cease bending the knee to this Being of whose existence you have never been furnished with evidence—then you may look out for squalls from him "who plants his footsteps on the sea and rides upon the storm!"

When the religious intrusionist finds he has utterly failed to bring a recalcitrant neighbour to a "knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus"; when he is obliged to conclude that he can do no more to that end, he decides to regard said neighbour as an outcast and an enemy of all that is true and wise and noble and pure and lovely and of good report. Accordingly his duty towards his *other* neighbours is to warn them against such an outcast and such an enemy of goodness. Such an one must be treated as an outcast and a pariah. He must be shunned and boycotted as being a co-worker with Satan!

It is a strange paradox; but to those who pretend to represent sacred things nothing is sacred. The policy and propaganda of the religious intrusionists betray a pitiable blindness to the potentialities of human nature and the possible sublimity of human life entirely unconnected with any belief in supernaturalism. The self-appointed guardians of the morals of their fellow-beings in every age have grossly slandered Freethinkers by describing them as the expounders of a system of hopelessness and despair. At the same time they have claimed the right to invade the privacy of all other human beings without regard to their desires or protests. And in the end they have proved themselves (as the experience of myriads at-tests) to be the promulgators of a system compounded of deadly dreariness and disabling superstition—a system that has bound the minds of millions with the fetters of ignorance, credulity and fear. Can anyone

call the present life—the only one any of us *knows*—a credit to the alleged Manager of the Universe? Millions are existing in destitution or on its verge; while swollen wealth struts across the stage, and brutalizing dictators are bowed to as God's deputies. And the mighty prelates draw their bloated stipends and love to have it so.

What sort of community is that which still tolerates the ghastly slums; which does not provide adequate means for the medical treatment of its injured and sick; which still counts in its ranks thousands of down-and-outs—parasitic dependents upon charity—robbed of their self-respect—enduring a privation which denies them decent food, decent clothing and decent shelter? It is the sort of community called "Christian." It is the sort of community which sinks the individual in the herd; which mistakes the shadow for the substance; which is content to regard the mass of human beings as a crowd of purposeless, struggling insects. Freethought demands the freedom, the nobility, and the independence of individual Man.

IGNOTUS.

Freethought Anniversaries

HENRIK IBSEN—MARCH 20, 1828

IN 1881 Ibsen published his greatest play, *Ghosts*. The story is brief. There are five characters, and it has for sub-title "A Family Drama in Three Acts," Mrs. Alving is the widow of a drunken debaucher; her son, Oswald, has inherited the seeds of disease from his father. Pastor Manders instead of helping her gave her good advice, told her about her duties and her husband's and unconsciously helped the profligate to make her life intolerable. A working carpenter Engstrand and his reputed daughter, Regina, complete the list. The three acts are played in one room in a Norwegian country-town house. The economy of effort is plainly visible from beginning to end.

At the opening of the play a memorial to Captain Alving is about to be opened. Mrs. Alving has built an orphanage in the town, and the pastor is to perform the ceremony. On the night before he is told the *whole* truth and has to go on with the job, the job of playing the hypocrite. He has just reminded her that he had sent her back to her husband and boasts of his action. "What right have we human beings to happiness?" Had not her husband reformed, lived blamelessly all his days, just as he, her pastor, had predicted? His disillusioning is tragic; then he learns that for nineteen years she had to live with a profligate, that the maid is Alving's daughter by a former maid, and all that Manders can say is "You have indeed had a life of trial." Later, it is discovered that the son has inherited his father's taints and tastes and the third act is so appalling in its stark realism as to stand in a class by itself. Let the reader of this sketch read—or re-read—the play, one of the greatest ever written.

Theatrical managers refused to look at it. Actors and actresses refused to act in it. The critics were almost of one voice; the thing was a moral offence. But Georg Brandes describes it as Ibsen's best and noblest. Björnson was enthusiastic.

On the thirteenth of March, 1891, *Ghosts* was produced at the Independent Theatre, London, by a young Dutchman, Mr. J. T. Grein. And a few hours later the morning papers were competing in abuse. Mr. Wm. Archer, a well known dramatic critic and enthusiastic Ibsenite made a list of the words and phrases used and it was a fearsome list. He called it *Ghosts and Gibberings*. Ibsen was a "ghoul . . . groping for horrors . . ." according to the *Gentlewoman*, "A teacher of the æstheticism of the Lock Hospital" according to the *Saturday Review*. One called it "a lazar house with open doors and windows," yet another said that 97 per cent of those who went were nasty-minded," the other

three, one presumes, being the critics, they being on the free list.

Long since, the tumult and the shouting has died, the critics and the prudes departed (most of them forgotten) and Henrik Ibsen hailed as Master Builder wherever the Human Drama is playing itself out.

Ibsen was born at Skien in Norway on March 20, 1828. Sea Captains and Merchant Adventurers were his ancestors through centuries; some have traced his genealogy to the fifteenth century! Here, it is not intended to write a detailed life, rather to waken an interest in this man and his great achievements. Everything in his life was of use, everyone was written into his work somewhere. His father's bankruptcy led to a loss of social status; later on the snobs paid for it. His mother's pietism caused an estrangement for years; his parsons were all drawn to life, not stupid; just ordinary parsons, and that was deadly sarcasm. (His brothers were of no note, and didn't appear in his plays). His sister—Hedwig was one who understood him and figures as *The Lady from the Sea*.

Ibsen, Master Builder, Freethinker, Anarchist, Atheist, died on May 23, 1906. His funeral was conducted by the State Church, and was patronized by King and Royal Family!

AUTOLYCUS.

Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

IS DEATH TERRIFYING?

SIR,—I have just read Mr. Chapin Cohen's "Sick Room Jottings" in your issue of March 1. In his reaction from the hideous Christian doctrine of life after death, does he not appear to go a little too far in the other direction. It is true that, to a Freethinker, the thought of what may happen to him after his bodily dissolution may present few terrors; but to present physical death in the almost glowing colours in which Mr. Cohen appears to indulge, is to go far beyond the hard fact which appears to face all of us.

"There should," says Mr. Cohen, "be nothing terrifying, nothing ugly, in death, to those who are about to die."

Further: "Dying cannot be a difficult thing, seeing how inevitably and how easily we all accomplish it."

Is Mr. Cohen to be taken literally in these passages? To say that not courage, but understanding only is required with which to face death, seems to me to burke facts which stare all in the face, young or old, observant and unobservant alike; for one cannot escape the conclusion that for most people, death is a hard, painful thing which, unlike childbirth, has to be faced by all, of both sexes; which can only be faced sanely, by calling up all the reserves of courage of which we are capable. I shall not readily forget the terrific description of old Anthony Chuzzlewit's end, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*; and while I do not for a moment suggest that such a hard lot falls to all of us, I cannot help feeling that only a very small and extremely lucky minority are fortunate enough to feel themselves "sinking softly, quietly and thankfully to sleep." Apart from any question of immortality, the agony and indignity of human dissolution is one of the most telling arguments possible against the presence of love in the Universe—apart from Mankind and some of the animals.

Speaking as a doctor, Celine in his *Journey to the End of Night*, said: "I have seen many people die—and it hurts like hell!" I think any of your readers who happen to be medical men could bear this out.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

[Mr. Cohen may deal, in the course of a week or two, with the interesting points raised by Mr. Carpenter.]

Law grinds the Poor and Rich Men rule the Law.

Goldsmith.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON

OUTDOOR

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

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

INDOOR

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Gauden Hotel, Gauden Road, Clapham, S.W.4): 7.30, Debate—"Is Evolution an Established Truth?" *Affir.*: Mr. T. F. Palmer. *Neg.*: Captain B. Ackworth, D.S.O. (Evolution Protest Movement).

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, J. P. Gilmour—"Pessimism, Optimism and Meliorism."

STUDY CIRCLE (68 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): 8.0, Monday, March 23, Mr. P. Goldman—"The Psychology of Patriotism."

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (The Labour Rooms, 70 Grange Park Road, Leyton, E.10): 7.30, H. C. White—"Some Humorous Aspects on Religion."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.): 7.30, Dr. Har Dayal—"Freethought and Equality."

COUNTRY

OUTDOOR.

BRIGHTON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Level): 8.0, Saturday, March 21, Mr. L. A. Miles—"Amenhotep and his God." The Level: 3.0, Sunday, March 22, Messrs. Miles and Byrne—"The Secularization of the State."

INDOOR

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Shakespeare Rooms, Edmund Street, Birmingham): 7.30, Impromptu Debate—"Is Life Made Up of Illusions?"

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Tavern Hotel, Godwin Street, Bradford): 7.15, Mr. A. C. Dutton—"Mud and Ignorance."

BRIGHTON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Labour Institute, 164 Elm Grove, Brighton): 7.30, Open Discussion on The Historical Jesus. Chairman: L. A. Miles.

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"Myth Theory No. 4."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, Open Night.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. E. C. Saphin—"The Stupidities of Jesus."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Cooper's Hall, 12 Shaw Street, Liverpool): 7.0, A. Jackson (Bootle)—"Peculiar Christians."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (11a Renshaw Street, Liverpool): 7.30 to 11.30, Social and Dance, Thursday, March 26. Tickets 1s. each, including refreshments.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Green Street): 7.0, A Lecture. Municipal and General Workers' Room, Athenaeum Street, afternoon meeting of the Northern Federation of the N.S.S. Branches.

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