

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED *by* CHAPMAN COHEN •

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

Views and Opinions

New Year Notes

It sounds like pure sarcasm to wish the world a happy New Year for 1937. In honesty, the utmost one can hope is that the year will be better than most people expect, and not quite so bad as others confidently forecast. Not for the first time in modern history we have from the Christian powers of the world a demonstration of the fact that they were utterly unable to agree upon anything save in a mutual determination to get ready for a general war that meant the destruction of civilization. Or if that war leaves some small remnants of civilization, it will be because non-nationalistic and non-religious common-sense manages to save something from the wreckage. In the case of previous wars some pretence of decency has been forthcoming. In the next "great war" there will be no such make-believe. The bombing-plane, which our own Government successfully fought in the League Council to maintain, has already become acclimatized for settling frontier disputes, and gas in its milder forms for civil ones. Abyssinia and Spain have shown that old men, non-combatants, women and children will be the deliberate aim of the gallant armies of the skies. The man in the trenches will probably have the safest job; the parsons in khaki will be more comfortable than those who remain at home to explain that when Christianity teaches "love one another," it means only so long as the "other" does nothing to displease the British Government. All Christian nations are united in terms of mutual distrust. A treaty between them gives less guarantee than one between "savages," for among these truthfulness is often counted as a virtue, and lying one of the cardinal sins. But no one to-day places any real reliance on the pledged word of the most Christian Statesman. A Prime Minister lies and is as secure from public condemnation as is an office boy who

hands on the lie that is given him by his employer. An Archbishop lies with no greater compunction than a racecourse welsher. The Christmas lie that the mission of Jesus Christ has established peace, love and brotherhood is told as glibly as ever. That lie has become so institutionalized that few take the trouble even to contradict it.

* * *

Our Parsons

As is to be expected the clergy are making the most they can of the situation. At the moment they are concentrating on the preservation of religion and the maintenance of what they are pleased to call morality. The first blast of the moral trumpet was blown three weeks ago, when Archbishop Lang, finding Edward VIII. wished to contract a decent marriage, denounced the King for his mode of life, although (less than a year earlier) he had commended him to the Empire as one whom he had known from childhood, and the Prime Minister, finding that the King was getting out of hand, and was inclined to use his influence on behalf of the distressed areas, helped the Archbishop to force an abdication. On this suddenly discovered "moral issue" the Bishops have been liberally "spreading" themselves. There have been one or two exceptions, the most notable of which was that of the Bishop of Chelmsford, who said that "it would be a good thing for the Church if a certain number of bishops and clergy were shot." Substitute country for Church, and there is a deal to be said for the proposition.

The Archbishop, who announces himself "the Empire's spiritual representative of God" (An Empire made up of a hundred or more different religions, and a much larger number of sects, to say nothing of many millions of "unbelievers") has asked all the Christian bodies to unite in an endeavour to bring people back to God. What a confession of failure! The Christian Church has had a control of the people that for centuries remained unquestioned. It had laws protecting it from criticism. It killed, or imprisoned, or deprived of legal rights those who attacked its teachings. It controlled the education of the child, and bought the friendship of the adult. Like priests its ministers lied in the name of truth, and, like priests, they preached hatred in the name of love. In these last two exhibitions of human faculty it is as active as ever: and Archbishop Lang issues a New Year call, "Christians unite." For what? To save the belief in God, he says. It cannot be done. The Archbishop is not a fool, and in this respect he is not likely really to believe that it can be done. But the effort may effect something. Those who already believe will announce that they have come back to God, there will be some processions, and many thousands of sermons will be preached. George VI. will doubtless obey orders by

wishing the movement success. And in the end the disintegration of religious belief will continue. The decay of belief could not be arrested even when the Church had in its service clergymen of unquestionable ability. It can meet with no greater success today when it has to put up with third-class brains. The educated public has ceased even to expect men of real intellectual power in the pulpit. Nonconformist Chapel or Established Church, the position is the same. The level of the pulpit sinks in direct proportion to the development of the general public.

* * *

Coronation Magic

The crooked brains of Archbishop Lang cannot function straightforwardly on even this simple issue. Just as in the Baldwin-Lang conspiracy a false issue was raised to achieve an unavowed end, so here again the real aim is to be partly disguised by utilizing the pantomimic performance of the coronation. He says:—

The Coronation like Christmas itself, is first of all an act of faith and worship in which the Empire, with the King, dedicates itself to the service of God.

I hope readers will remember this, because nearer the date of the Coronation I intend dealing with the coronation ceremony, and to show how saturated with magic and superstition the whole thing is. But the Archbishop must be either very foolish, or very desperate to use language of this kind. How does the Empire dedicate itself to God at the coronation? And, if that is the case, to which God does the Empire dedicate itself? By his attitude towards Edward VIII's desire to exercise his legal right to marry the woman of his choice, instead of following the custom in such cases of merely living with her, the Archbishop showed that when he talks of God, he means the God of the Established Church. The King may dedicate himself to the Christian God or to any other God, so far as we are concerned, but if the coronation means what the Archbishop says it does, then it also means that the larger part of the King's subjects will, so far as they are concerned, regard the coronation as a most elaborate lie and a deliberate insult to them personally. It is very bad advertising.

This is rather surprising, because the mythology of royalty that has been built during the past four or five reigns has been very carefully and very cleverly done. Once a part has been decided on for King or Queen or Crown Prince, and the character is very carefully sustained. The speeches are so carefully prepared that they are all of a piece. The Jubilee speech of George V. was so completely in tune with the picture drawn of him as a simple-natured, simple-minded family man bearing the burden of Empire, that when that speech was given I was inclined to think that it was his own composition. But the Archbishop himself explained in the columns of the *Evening Standard*, that the King never saw the speech until it was completed, and then merely suggested the placing of the Queen's name at the end of the address instead of at the opening. No professional dramatist could have so carefully prepared a speech more in tune with one of his characters. I admired its skill, but was still more interested because of the light it threw on the careful manner in which royalty is kept before the public and the mythology that is woven round them. I repeat, therefore that the Archbishop is not as subtle as one might expect him to be. It is really dangerous to remind those with sufficient education to appreciate the fact, that Kingship belongs to a very primitive stratum of

human history, and that the "mystical" character of the coronation is a return to the forest-clearing with its drums, paint and feathers and medicine-men in their full regalia. The only possible justification for the Archbishop's language is that he wishes to gain converts—and he can only hope to gain them from the ranks of the less thoughtful—and that if he can get those who are still within the fold to take part in the public processions he hopes to lead, that may be something to the good.

* * *

About Ourselves

I would like Freethinkers, when they have had their legitimate laugh at this archiepiscopal Mrs. Partington trying to arrest the decay of the religious idea by calling on the various religious odds and ends to take part in a gigantic "Let us save God" campaign, to take the Archbishop's call to arms as a challenge. It is, after all, quite easy for Freethinkers to underestimate the strength of the primitive mind to which the Archbishop appeals. Recent events have shown us, or ought to have shown us, that the Established Church, in co-operation with other interests, is still powerful to exercise a decisive influence on even the King. The mythology of royalty that has been developing since the Jubilee of Victoria, built up the conception in the public mind that the King does actually rule, or that he has some real power over those who actually rule. The abdication of Edward *ought* to kill that idea. The King is shown to be a mere cipher. He may, if he has strength and ability enough, cause a little friction, as a clerk in an office may when he insists on addressing letters wrongly, or is always behindhand in addressing envelopes. But in the main he must do what he is told to do, say what is prepared for him to say, and bless or curse as his advisers dictate. But the artificial "crisis" should have helped to exhibit to thousands the power still exercised by the Churches and the underhand manner in which that power is exercised. In his broadcast on Sunday last the Archbishop asked that "recent events might be kept in silence." Naturally! So a prisoner at the Old Bailey might ask that the past events of his life should be "kept in silence." The public would be even more foolish than we take it to be if it deliberately ignores the trickery, the dishonesty, and the underhand methods of Archbishop Lang.

At any rate Freethinkers should not forget what has happened. And the fitting reply to his pitiable appeal should be the determination to do what can be done to make secure the ground we have won, and to make further inroads on enemy territory. I know that is not an easy task. The foolish platitudes of the Archbishop fall upon ears that have from infancy been trained to a set response to the like, and which has about as much to do with logical reasoning as the movements of a performing animal have with the patter of his trainer. The reaction of the *Christian* world is unthinking, stereotyped, and intellectually and morally valueless. That is all that the Archbishop and his kind desire or require. And in addition there is the lure of social, political and even financial advancement to induce men and women to tread a path that has been paved with infamy ever since religion prolonged itself into civilized times.

But *we* can do much to alter this. First of all there is this paper—the one uncompromising weekly Freethought journal in this country. When I came out of hospital in the early part of 1936, there was a move to offer me a presentation as a kind of thanksgiving on my recovery. I declined that but suggested that a very welcome "testimonial" would be

for each reader who was sufficiently interested to take an extra copy of the paper and use it as a means of getting a new regular subscriber. I know it is much easier for most people to send along a subscription than to do as I asked, but I was pleased to note the number who responded, and who succeeded in getting that new reader—some got more than one, and are still on the "prowl." I did not get the thousand extra readers for which I asked, but we are on the way, and I am prolonging that appeal to see what 1937 will yield. A very widely circulated *Freethinker* would be the best reply to the insolence and the foolishness of the Archbishop's speech.

Then there is the new edition of the *Age of Reason*. This is one of the most formidable popular attacks on the Christian superstition ever published. Against their will the clergy have been forced to admit the truth of much of it, and to adopt as their own, other parts—but all the time, with characteristic cowardice and dishonesty, continuing their slanders on Thomas Paine.

This new and complete edition, tastefully printed, with a lengthy introduction by myself, the whole running to 250 pages is being issued at the phenomenal price of fourpence. It is not a commercial proposition. It is propaganda purely. But here is a weapon that can be handed to a Christian friend or acquaintance, and provided his brain is not completely addled by his theological training, *The Age of Reason* cannot but have its influence. If a thousand readers purchase a few copies of this historically great book by the founder of English democracy, and circulate it, that should help to bring our movement before those who are strangers to it. Reading this book should lead to reading the *Freethinker*, and reading the *Freethinker*, the best hated and the most loved journal in this country, should finish the work of conversion.

So let us all resolve to make 1937 a year of serious and sustained work for Freethought. Events all over the world have emphasized Milton's dictum that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. But not merely eternal vigilance, constant action is essential if we are to retain what we have won, and add to the limited freedom that has been attained. The Archbishop has behind him all those milleniums of ignorance and superstition upon which his creed builds. We have only the gleams of intelligence that have broken through here and there, and the inspiration of the possibilities they hold out. In the long run we are bound to win. *In the long run*. But between us and the winning post there may lie seasons of disaster and retrogression. Once before the Christian Church brought upon the civilized world the darkness of retrogression. If the Archbishop and his kind have their way they will repeat that historic performance. We must all do what we can to prevent it.

So the best of wishes for 1937. Let us hope it will not be so black as it looks. It *will* not be, if each of us resolves it *shall* not be.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Man's chief wisdom consists in being sensible of his follies.—*Rochejoucauld*.

The military indulgences of the Popes, caused the effusion of oceans of blood, and have been productive of incalculable misery.—*Lecky*.

Our Lawn-Sleeved Legislators

"The services of the clergy are imaginary, and their payment should be of the same description."

G. W. Foote.

"Of what use are the Bishops in the House of Lords?"—*Lord Shaftesbury*.

THE recent spectacular irruption into current politics of the Lords Spiritual, as if these ecclesiastical antiquities were of any real importance to the nation, is a reminder that the continued association between Church and State is not only ripe for discussion, but calls for decisive action. On this particular occasion the Archbishops and Bishops have merely added to the considerable number of Kings in exile, and not so much harm has been done. But, unwittingly, they have caused the searchlight of criticism to be directed, not only upon the institution of monarchy, but also to the activities of the Lords Spiritual themselves.

These ecclesiastical activities are well worth attention. A short time since the Archbishop of Canterbury, who, be it remembered, is the head of only one of the hundred sectarian religious bodies in this country, was allowed to use the microphone for a broadcast, and launched an address which can only be described as urbane insolence, and which, at an earlier period, would have jeopardised his liberty and even his life. How is it that such things happen in the twentieth century? And what part had the British Broadcasting Corporation in launching such episcopal nonsense without the full force of Government approval?

Priests invariably pretend that they are uninfluenced by considerations of power or finance, whereas the blunt truth is that they have always striven with all their might for temporal power, and never let a shilling pass them alive. The so-called Church of England, whose communicants form only a small percentage of the population, is the wealthiest church in the world. And Anglican priests wield enormous power out of all proportion to their actual position as a purely sectarian religious body. Using the time-honoured tricks of its sorry profession, this Church actually controls national education, and, by virtue of its voting strength in the House of Lords, holds the balance of power in the Upper House of Parliament, and by this means has succeeded in retarding progress for centuries.

Everybody can see what this ecclesiastical control means in practice. Under priestly direction, education in this country, in the universities and public schools, has been directed to the cultivation of "brawn and not brains." So far as the elementary schools are concerned, it is sufficient to add that, as the majority of scholars leave their studies at fourteen years of age, they can only be half-educated. Indeed, when Free Education was compulsorily introduced in 1870 by the State, half the nation was actually illiterate, after near two millenniums of priestly authority and boasted care for culture.

The priestly record in Parliament is no whit better than their exploitation of education. Their conception of their duties as legislators was always that they were in the House of Lords as "lords" in order to maintain the rights and privileges of Priestcraft, and for no other purpose whatever. All questions of progress were shelved, and all reforms met with the most determined and persistent opposition. As legislators these Church of England bishops have always been the worst enemies of Democracy. Right throughout the nineteenth century these ecclesiastics resisted all measures introduced to ameliorate the conditions of the English peoples. They voted against a Bill to prevent people being hanged for stealing a



few shillingworth of goods. They tried, again and again, to exclude from political power great numbers of law-abiding citizens. They tried to prevent Non-conformists from burying their dead with their own rites. Even modest measures for the early closing of shops and for the provision of seats for tired assistants were opposed. Bishops voted against admitting women as members of London Borough Councils. None voted for the abolition of flogging women in public, flogging women in prison, or the use of the lash in the Army and Navy. Scores of measures for the bettering of the conditions of the working-classes have been opposed by these purse-proud prelates, and their record is sufficient to carry its own condemnation.

The episcopal attitude on war throws a searchlight on priestly mentality. War has been waged by this country in every quarter of the globe during the past few generations. We have fought Frenchmen, Germans, Russians, Afghans, Chinese, Sudanese, Zulus, Boers, Americans, and others. Just or unjust, whether provoked by ambition or bad diplomacy, the Christian Bishops never condemned these wars. Indeed, they made hypocrisy one of the fine arts. Professing to worship the "carpenter of Nazareth," they opposed all measures for helping working-people; acknowledging their Christ as the "Prince of Peace," they blessed regimental flags, christened battle-ships, and acted as army chaplains with the pay of officers and not private soldiers. Is it not a miserable record?

The Church of England is an anachronism in the twentieth century, and is but a survival of Feudalism. It has long outlived whatever usefulness it ever had. No reform of this effete institution is needed. It should be divorced from its association with the modern State, and its stolen revenues diverted to really useful objects. And why has the disestablishment and disendowment of this most Conservative and reactionary of churches been dropped out of the present-day Democratic programme? This so-called Church of England simply absorbs so many millions of money and so many offices and dignities, and is of no more use to Democracy than the Primrose League, an organization founded to perpetuate the memory of the most Machiavellian of modern statesmen.

Elsewhere one knows what a particular Church stands for. You say this obeys implicitly the Papal Patriarch and the College of Cardinals; that is faithful to the Westminster Confession; and another yields homage to the be-whiskered Eastern patriarchs. Still another looks towards Ma Eddy's "Key to the Scriptures," and Latter Day Saints revere the memory of Joe Smith's *Book of Mormon*. But ask what this precious Church of England stands for and who can tell you? One Bishop slyly points to the "Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion," while another looks towards Rome, and both laugh in their dainty lawn sleeves at the simplicity of the ordinary citizen, and pocket the cash.

This particular Church of England concerns Freethinkers, Socialists, Communists, as well as professing Christians. For the legal theory of the country makes us all parties to the constitution of this creature of Parliament. If it were in the United States or the British Colonies, where no such thing as a State Church exists, we need not care a button what humbug or hypocrisy went on in a particular church, for it would be none of our affair. But the legislation of the British Parliament makes us, as it were, all partners in this State-supported Church of England, and compels us to be, whether we like it or not, privy to its chicanery and dishonesty.

Now, can you fancy a real Republic being set up in this country by people who have not the courage to

challenge "the lie at the lips of the priest?" Therefore Freethinkers urge their policy of disestablishment and disendowment on the attention of all Democrats in the knowledge that it is fast increasing in favour among the people, and in the conviction that, sooner or later, it will be adopted.

MIMNERMUS.

An Interview with the Community of "True Christians"

Interviewer: Would you be so kind as to furnish me, in my capacity of Press representative, with some particulars of your new sect?

Spokesman for the Community: With pleasure. To begin with you are labouring under a threefold misapprehension. The sect, as you call it, is not *mine*; it is not *new*; and it is not a *sect*.

I.: Please explain.

S.: Willingly. The community of True Christians is not *mine*, because its founder is Jesus Christ. It is not *new* for the same reason. It is not a *sect*, because we are the true Church. It is all the other erroneous varieties of so-called Christians which constitute the *sects*.

I.: I see. But does not every other Christian community. . . .

S.: *Sect*, if you please.

I.: All right—*sect*. Since every other Christian *sect* asserts that it has the true faith, how do you attempt to dispose of their claims?

S.: Your innocence—I will not call it ignorance—is pathetic.

I.: Please enlighten me. Don't trouble to spare my feelings.

S.: I won't. I mean I will. That is to say, I *will* enlighten you and I *won't* spare your feelings—if you have any.

I.: I have. But they are quite subordinate to my craving for journalistic success.

S.: We are brothers under the skin. I think you will do for my next convert.

I.: Heaven forbid! But what of the converts you have already made?

S.: I have already chosen the eleven.

S.: That's good going. A team already! Is it soccer, hockey or cricket?

S. (with dignity): Sir, we represent the twelve disciples.

I.: Please introduce me.

S. (calls out): Oh, come all ye faithful! (*Eleven young men troop in.*)

I.: Good God, what a weedy bunch!

S.: Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.

I.: I agree. I've never seen anything quite like it.

S.: As for being "weedy," as you call it, may I remind you what St. Paul said: "Bodily exercise profiteth little." But let me introduce you. The six in the front row are Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Thomas and Philip. There was no difficulty in selecting them because the four Evangelists give them a vote apiece. Then come James minor, Simon minor and Bartholomew. They only got three votes each. We had better skip the rest.

I.: But why? That only accounts for nine. What about Matthew?

S.: The trouble with him is that he can't make up his mind whether he ought to be called Matthew or Levi. You see, there is no actual passage in the Gospels which states that they were one and the same

person. Anyhow, I've told that chap over there that unless he picks on one or the other name by Saturday, I will give him the sack. D'ye hear that, Matthew Levi?

Matthew Levi: I want to be Jesus.

S.: Shut up! You're Matthew or Levi, or else. . . .

I.: That accounts for ten. What about the little fellow at the back?

S.: He's the most tiresome of the lot. The fact is that the Gospels give him a choice of three names—Nathaniel, Thaddæus or Judas. He refuses to be Nathaniel because three Gospels don't mention the name. He won't have Thaddæus because someone said it was a camouflage for Judas. And he jibs at Judas because he says people will think he is Judas Iscariot. If he becomes too obstreperous I shall call him Judy. But he says he wants a new name.

Simon Peter (interviewing): We've got a new name for him, and a jolly good one too.

S.: Well, boys; what have you chosen?

All the ten at once: New Name—New Sance—Nuisance!

The eleventh (protesting): I won't be called Nuisance. I want to be Jesus.

S.: Good God—you too! What next! You'll be wanting us to call you "God" soon.

The eleventh: You did.

S.: I did what?

The eleventh: You called me God. You said "Good God" to me.

S. (*wringing his hands*): Isn't it hopeless. It's like measles. They've all had a dose of it. *Imitatio Christi* I call it. But I forgive them, for they know not what they do. It just shows you what trouble can be caused by a little vagueness in the Bible.

I.: It seems to me that they resent your assumption of leadership.

S.: But I'm not the leader.

I.: Don't you represent Our Lord himself?

S.: Our Lord? Good Lord, no! I'm just the treasurer—Judas Iscariot.

I.: Oh! I beg your pardon. But—er—oughtn't you to go and hang yourself?

S.: All in good time. I can't do that till the rest of the team—I mean, the eleven—has been definitely chosen. In the meanwhile let me prove the genuineness of our beliefs as compared with those of other so-called Christians.

I.: I shall be glad of a demonstration.

S.: In the first place let me ask you a question. Are you proficient in the art of self-defence?

I.: I'm pretty handy with my fists.

S.: So am I. But what would you do if a man were to smack your face without provocation?

I.: Punch him on the nose.

S.: Ah! That proves you are no Christian. Now watch me closely. I begin by giving myself a smack on my right cheek—so! Then I turn my left cheek—so! That proves I am a true Christian.

I.: I see. You take Christ's words literally. But supposing someone else were to smack your face—me for instance—would you then turn the other cheek?

S.: Of course. But I'd land you a good wallop immediately afterwards. Remember, Christ didn't say "turn to him the other cheek and leave it at that."

I.: I regard that as a quibble. Didn't Christ say: "Resist not evil"?

S.: But I don't resist evil. In fact I requite evil with good.

I.: In what way?

S.: I requite an evil smack with a good wallop. Furthermore, if the event were to occur in winter, I might even heap some coals of fire on your head.

I.: Christ also said: "Him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also." What would you do in a case of that sort?

S.: Oh, I would never dream of *forbidding* him. I would just *prevent* him. And, what's more, I'd make him give me back the cloak too. Christ never said we shouldn't do that.

I.: I suppose you think yourself very clever. But what about Christ's saying: "Give to every man that asketh of thee."

S.: I obey it to the letter.

I.: Very well—give me a five pound note.

S.: Wait a minute. (*He opens a drawer, takes something out and hands it to the Interviewer*).

I.: This isn't a five pound note. It's a biscuit.

S.: And a very nice biscuit too.

I.: But I asked for a five pound note. Come on—hand it over!

S.: Not so fast. You forget that Christ did *not* say: "Give to every man *exactly* what he asketh of thee."

I.: Your interpretation of Christ's words is very subtle.

S.: Not at all. Just literal—and practical.

I.: All right—you win. But how do you carry out this command—"Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." It ought to make your job as treasurer a pretty easy one.

S.: It does. Let me show you how. (*He crosses the room to a panel in the wall*). You see this panel?

I.: I do.

S.: Behind it is a rust and moth-proof safe, and it contains the combined treasure of our community. But before we put a brass farthing inside it, we held a christening ceremony and called it "Heaven."

I.: What about thieves breaking into it and stealing the contents?

S.: Not a chance. There's nothing in it to steal.

I.: But what . . . I don't understand . . . I give it up.

S.: Pray don't overtax your intelligence. Christ said: "Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor." Well, we all sold everything we had and gave it to the poor. Several of us are still locked up in a back room without even a pair of pants between them.

I.: But you and the eleven are wearing clothes—of a sort.

S.: They are borrowed. We borrowed them from each other first.

I.: I must confess that your generosity surprises me. What poor did you give your money to?

S.: The poor treasurer.

I.: You mean—you mean you have taken it all yourself!

S. (*addressing the eleven*): Boys! Have I ever taken anything from you?

The eleven: Never! You just borrowed.

S.: Now tell this gentleman what Our Lord Jesus commanded you to do.

The eleven: He said: "From him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."

S.: Quite right. What else?

The eleven: He said: "Lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great."

S.: And does any of you hope for anything again?

Simon Peter: You said you'd lend me tuppence for a liquorice stick.

S.: (*severely*) Do any of you hope for anything again!

The eleven: Not in this life.

S.: That's better! And what about your great reward?

The eleven: Yes—what about it?

S.: Boys! When you are all dead, you'll get

everything you want—and more also. Jesus Christ said so. Don't you believe Him?

The eleven: Yes, we do. But what about . . .

S.: That's quite enough for to-day. You may all go now and read your Bibles and pray. And don't come bothering me any more.

(*The eleven troop meekly out of the room.*)

S.: (to the Interviewer) Now, how about your being baptized into the true faith?

I.: True fiddlesticks! You're just a common faker. I'll report you to the authorities. I'm off!

S.: God be with you—and don't forget to mention all the other fakers too!

C. S. FRASER.

Poems on Death

(*Death*, by Bishop Porteous; *The Grave*, by the Rev. R. Blair; *An Elegy*, by Mr. Gray; *The Last Day*, by Dr. Young. London: Published by John Mason, at the Wesleyan Conference Office, 14 City Road; and sold at 66 Paternoster Row, 1841.)

SEEK, whether you find or not! Joy is to be found both in seeking and finding. When the above little volume, which was well worth the twopence paid for it, fell into my hands recently, I felt overjoyed.

The first poem *Death*, by Bishop Porteous, is intended to be very pious and very grave, and the second and fourth are like unto it, but I found them all rather comic, and strangely heretical. The third poem, *An Elegy*, by Mr. Gray, is serious, but unlike the other three.

In the beginning of his poem on *Death*, Bishop Porteous strikes an heretical note:—

"Ill-fated man, for whom such various forms
Of misery wait, and mark their future prey;
Ah! why, all-righteous Father, didst thou make
This creature, man? Why wake the unconscious dust
To life and wretchedness? O better far
Still had he slept in uncreated night,
If this the lot of being! Was it for this
Thy breath divine kindled within his breast
The vital flame? For this was thy fair image
Stamp'd on his soul in god-like lineaments?
For this dominion given him absolute
O'er all thy works, only that he might reign
Supreme in woe? From the blest source of good
Could Pain and Death proceed? Could such foul ills
Fall from fair Mercy's hand?"

Even the Deity must have got tired of his questions, and have shirked most of them.

Man not only brought DEATH into the world but, as his kind increased and multiplied, he invented war to assist DEATH—

"Whole kingdoms fell
To sate the lust of power: more horrid still,
The foulest stain and scandal of our nature
Became its boast. One murder made a villain;
Millions a hero."

Later on he cheers his fellow-men thus:—

"Though life seem one uncomfortable void,
Guilt at thy heels, before thy face Despair;
Yet gay the scene, and light this load of woe,
Compared with thy hereafter."

He warns us that an unkind fate will rob us of this earth "And all the lovely relatives of life." But he allows us to make our escape, ultimately, by "bursting from the thradom of encumbering clay," whether to join our "lovely relatives," or not, he does not inform us.

"To paint the gloomy horrors of the Tomb," is the task the Rev. R. Blair sets himself in *The Grave*, and here is his first picture:—

"Well do I know thee by thy trusty yew,
Cheerless unsocial plant! that loves to dwell
'Midst skulls and coffins, epitaphs and worms;
Where light-heel'd ghosts, and visionary shades,
Beneath the wan cold moon (as fame reports)
Embodied thick, perform their mystic rounds:
No other merriment, dull tree! is thine."

Little interest or sympathy do many of his pictures call up, save this one:—

"The schoolboy, with his satchel in his hand,
Whistling aloud to bear his courage up."

Later he asks some "courtous ghost to blab the secret out":—

"What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be?"

But getting no reply:—

"Well, 'tis no matter
A very little time will clear up all
And make us learned as you are, and as close."

Here in his own choice language, we must:—

"Stalk off reluctant, like an ill-used ghost,
And leave him and his 'Grave.'"

Gray's *Elegy* needs no mention here, so I pass on to Dr. Young's *Last Day*. When I was a lad Dr. Young's *Night Thoughts* was given me to correct Shakespeare's "carnal influence." Severely gloomy it is, but not to the exclusion of the comic spirit, though it is a chaste spirit, not given to revels like the one in the *Last Day*. But the comic, happiness, or anything approaching merriment, partakes of the nature of sin

"Man's is laborious happiness at best."

Once or twice, like Bishop Porteous, he questions the Deity:—

"What dreadful pangs the trembling heart invade?
Lord, why dost thou forsake whom thou hast made?"

Again:—

"Father of Mercies! why from silent earth
Didst thou awake, and curse me into birth?
Tear me from quiet, ravish me from night,
And make a thankless present of thy light?
Push into being a reverse of thee,
And animate a clod with misery?"

In Book II. things begin to get lively:—

"Again the trumpet's intermitted sound
Rolls the wide circuit of creation round,"

to call, evidently, all the missing parts of bodies together:—

"Now monuments prove faithful to their trust,
And render back their long committed dust.
Now, charnel rattle; scatter'd limbs, and all
The various bones, obsequious to the call,
Self-moved, advance; the neck perhaps to meet
The distant head; the distant legs the feet.
Dreadful to view, see through the dusky sky
Fragments of bodies in confusion fly,
To distant regions journeying, there to claim
Deserted members, and complete the frame."

"The body thus renewed, the conscious soul
Which has perhaps been fluttering near the pole"
now gets a chance of joining up. And everything seems in order. The only complaint he makes relates to God's "awful feet."

"Stars on his robe in beauteous order meet,
And the sun burns beneath his awful feet."

Referring to the transcendent glory of the just he draws some interesting comparisons:—

"Thus the chaste bridegroom, when the priest draws nigh,
Beholds his blessing with a trembling eye."

Then he asks to be shown "this little isle, this gem set in the silver sea":—

"Show me that celebrated spot, where all
The various rulers of the sever'd ball
Have humbly sought wealth, honour, and redress,—
That land which Heaven seem'd diligent to bless,—
One call'd Britannia: can her glories end?
And can surrounding seas her realms defend?
Alas! in flames behold the surrounding seas!
Like oil, their waters but augment the blaze."

Later he asks us:—

"Have you not seen the eternal mountains nod?"

And whether we have or have not, he asks us to:—

"Think deeply then, O man, how great thou art."

And shows us how we may achieve greatness:—

"What stores, on foreign coasts, thy landing wait:

Lose not thy claim, let virtue's path be trod;
Thus glad all heaven, and please that bounteous God."

He leaves us in doubt as to whether all heaven is to be gladdened by our confiscation of the "stores on foreign coasts," or by treading in virtue's path.

So here we have a poem, of 1242 lines, of morbid groaning and moaning over our life here, and that which is to come. Greatness is offered us at the price of stealing other people's goods, only seven lines from its end, and, if we succeed, the sun which lighted our path on this and similar exploits:—

"Shall fade away

And God shine forth in one eternal day."

Thus ends Dr. Young's vision of his last day.

GEORGE WALLACE.

Acid Drops

Our best thanks to the Bishop of London. He has given us the usual example of his superb stupidity as a kind of New Year's gift. What is called the "Mystery of the Incarnation" has puzzled people for a couple of thousand years or more. Now the Bishop offers an explanation. In the *Referee* for December 27 he explains that God wanted someone to love him. So he made the world, and worked at it for "two thousand million years" so that he might not merely have someone to love, but also someone to love him. Is this not affecting? Think of a poor lonely God with no one to love him, and then planning and plotting for some million years to get what he desired! And after waiting all this time, and then getting a third of himself incarnated so that mankind might love him, to find that it is only a diminishing number of people who bother about him to any serious extent. Fancy having to put up with a Winnington Ingram and losing a La Place, a Darwin, an Einstein! It is a position that goes beyond laughter and extends to tears. One loses interest in the amusing antics of the clown in contemplating the sufferings and disappointments of the pantaloon. But perhaps it is all a very elaborate joke, and the two thousand million years of God's travail was to produce a Winnington Ingram, so that in order that God might have something to laugh at whenever he felt disheartened at the thinning ranks of his worshippers. In that case we must acclaim the Bishop of London as being God Almighty's supreme work. His mentality is seldom flawed by the least trace of common sense. To use a Spinozistic phrase, he is perfect after his kind.

Two items from the papers of December 22:—

(1) The Archbishop of Canterbury was received in audience by the King.

(2) The King will attend Church on Christmas morning.

The Archbishop is running no risks with this King, and the King is taking none.

The *Daily Telegraph* has discovered a new humorist, a W. G. Bell, and unlike its usual make up, has given to Mr. Bell, a position on its leader page. It must be the spirit of Christmas that has animated the editor, particularly as Mr. Bell has taken for his subject "The Star of Bethlehem." Mr. Bell states the story of the wonderful star which acted as guide to the Magi, and led them to where the new-born Jesus was lying in a stable. Mr. Bell points out that no known star, and no conceivable star could have behaved in this way, for if it had led them towards the East it would have landed the Magi in China, and in any case, no matter how far one went, a star would still appear to be just above one's head. Mr. Bell sustains his humour to the end, for he says in his closing paragraph that as such is unknown to science, is even inconceivable to science, it must be "wholly miraculous." Science simply can offer no explanation of it, and, therefore, "St. Matthew's narrative stands." Excellent! Nothing better has been done

since Mark Twain accepted the account of the exact spot where Adam was buried, because no one had ever been able to prove that Adam was not buried there. But the *Daily Telegraph* is very bold in showing up the New Testament yarn in this manner. But we hope to see some more of Mr. Bell's humour. He might deal with the Virgin Birth in the same way. But we question whether the staid *Daily Telegraph* would continue on this line. Perhaps the editor had been "celebrating."

The *Daily Telegraph* for December 28 starts a leading article on the tremendous event of a baby being born to the Duke and Duchess of Kent, with the remark that the event comes "with the glamour of fairy romance." We agree that it will to all those who are still in the fairy-tale stage of mental development, and who regard anything connected with a member of the Royal Family, from a Queen blowing her nose to the unusual event of a princess giving birth to a baby as something at which the planets themselves might well stand still in wonder.

Elevated by this birth, the *Daily Telegraph* heads another leading article, "Herr Hitler's Two Alternatives." Now what would have happened had Hitler presented the world with three or four alternatives? We should remember that it is Christmas time, and that the abbreviated description of the *Telegraph* is D.T.

Mr. Beverley Nichols replies to a critic of his stupid book *The Fool Has Said*, with an article headed "My Reply to a Fool." We have had many examples in the history of literature of men writing letters to themselves, but we do not recall one quite so telling as this one of Mr. Nichols. Anyway his intelligent readers will make no mistake as to the intended recipient of the document.

The new Governor of Bermuda, Sir Reginald Hildyard, has raised a storm by his first important speech. The various priests, missionaries, and lay religious bodies, are staggered at his proposal to establish birth-control clinics for negroes, to which the Colonial Parliament actually has voted £125 to commence with. A deputation of Harlem citizens called upon Sir Reginald to protest; but we are glad that he "reaffirmed his stand on the matter." When will these religious busybodies recognize that Birth-Control has come to stay?

As Catholics seem unable to open their mouths without flinging the text, "Thou art Peter, etc," at disputants, it is particularly interesting to note what St. Augustine (who is never quoted) says about it in his *Retractions*: "In the passage about the Apostolic Peter, I said that the Church was founded upon him as upon a rock . . . but I have since most frequently argued that the Rock was founded on Him whom Peter confessed. Of these two opinions, let the reader choose which is the more probable." It seems then that even the great St. Augustine was not quite so certain as our modern Catholics as to which was the Rock—Peter according to them, or Jesus, according to Protestants. Anyway, you has your pick and takes your choice.

A *Church Times* reviewer of the ever-green Whitaker tries to point out how very, very unreliable religious statistics can be. The Roman Catholic population in North America is given as 40,000,000; but in detail, the U.S.A. is credited with about 18,000,000, while Canada with about 4,000,000—that is, roughly 22,000,000. Where are the other 18 millions, he asks? Well, the answer is in Mexico, of course, but whether much genuine Roman Catholicism will now be found there, is a question. Incidentally, Whitaker gives the number of Jews in England as 270,000, though from the way Fascists and other anti-Semites talk about their "influence," one would imagine it was the English people who numbered 270,000, all the rest being Jews.

And now there is a determined attempt to give "Catholic Action" a little more action. A pastoral letter on the question, signed by Archbishops and Bishops, was read recently in all the churches in England and Wales; and it gives a clarion call to Action. "Leakage" is one of the urgent problems—though why Catholics should want to give up Catholicism when they are constantly assured it is God's own religion, is a mystery. At least, it seems to be a mystery to the aforesaid Archbishops and Bishops. It is no mystery to us; for we recognize you can't fool the people *all* the time.

"The Times call for United Energy," is one of the Action Slogans; and in particular, we are assured, the alternatives are "either Atheistic Communism, or the full acceptance of Christianity." But there is another alternative—the full acceptance of the principles of Freethought; and Freethought means opposition to all dictators, whether religious or economic.

The ignorance in lay minds about Purgatory must be appalling. Most people seem to think it is a place where people go to after death—totally unlike Summerland or Etheria, by the way—where their souls get cleansed from venial sin, as the result of fervent prayers and much payment. It is much more than that; however, and the latest book on the subject is by Dr. Bartmann, who naturally knows all about it, and has written "a comprehensive treatise, theological, historical, and practical"—which, while throwing overboard "a great deal that has come down to us of the horrific and pictorial kind," yet is quite authoritative. We now know that "to be in Hell is to have lost God; to be in Purgatory is to be safe in his arms." What a pity it is that some of us actually prefer Hell!

Although the late Mr. Gladstone has suffered, in spite of his interminable loquacity, a somewhat sad eclipse, his windy speeches are still searched for gems of wisdom. But we gladly acknowledge that he knew where the real battle lay. He said, in one of his letters to his wife:—

I am convinced that the welfare of mankind does not now depend on the State or in the world of politics. The real battle is being fought out in the world of thought, where a deadly attack is being made with great tenacity of purpose and over a wide field, upon man's greatest treasure, his belief in God and the Gospel of Christ.

Mr. Gladstone was probably smarting at his being "unhorsed" by Ingersoll in a memorable debate when he wrote that; he would be perhaps writing in even stronger terms about the "real battle," were he living now. At all events, he would have seen the Gospel of Christ in a far worse mess than it was in his day.

Two Eton boys got lost the other day, and were found exhausted in a shop after one of them had sent a telegram to his parents announcing that he had found Christ. The proprietress of the shop made a "remarkable" statement to the effect that she had the boys under her influence, and that she had "supernatural" powers. As a sequel, the shop has been put out of bounds. But why? Surely an Eton boy who has found Christ is a great acquisition to the school and a splendid example for all the other boys; while the masters ought to pay reverent homage to a lady who has supernatural powers. Should the Headmaster of such a Christian school as Eton object to people who can make his boys find Christ?

The usual number of conversions to Roman Catholicism every year is about 12,000. During 1935, however, there was a drop of 558; and this, with the losses caused by "indifferentists"—of whom there are constant complaints—and by Catholics becoming Freethinkers or Communists, gives rise to a serious situation. Converts are notoriously *plus royaliste que le roi*—and this cuts both ways. No wonder the "Hierarchy" look to "Catholic Action" to do something to stop the rot.

More and more do the Bishops show how violently they are opposed to divorce reform. The other day the Bishop of Bradford said, "The marriage laws of the State are very difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with the marriage laws of the Church," and the *Church Times* adds, "They are becoming even more difficult." Well, what about it? It is the Church which will be forced to submit eventually to the State, no matter how it protests. The only marriage recognized in this country is that performed by the State, and it is the State which should be able, where necessary, to unmake a marriage unhampered by the dead hand of a religious myth invented 1900 years ago. There is no compulsion whatever put on people who wish to conform rigidly to the Church's ways; and all we ask is that they stop interfering with people who no longer believe in the Church. And it will come to that in spite of all the Bishops in Christendom.

The religious papers find themselves in a congenial atmosphere in times of royal "crises." The *British Weekly* remarks anent the Coronations of any British Sovereign are probably stereotyped ready for use without alteration except just to add "the queen also" when the new monarch is married. Here are two sentences admirably applicable to all new monarchs:—

We have not the slightest doubt that the new King, by his own quality and later by his merit, will, should God bless him with many years, continue our highest tradition of Royalty.

We never had a team, or better, a family group more likely to establish itself in our loyal devotion and in our familiar thoughts.

The Bishop of Bradford has let the cat out of the bag about the way in which "excavations" are supposed to have upset what is called the "Higher Criticism" of the Bible. In his Introduction to *The Bible and the Spade*, by S. L. Caiger, he says:—

It is unfortunate that the recent discoveries in Palestine which have shed so interesting a light on the early history of the Hebrew invasion have at times been misused in the interests of an unscholarly prejudice against the work of those who are vaguely called "the higher critics"; and we have been treated to such statements as that "archæology has disproved the higher criticism." It is a serious mistake thus to set archæology and criticism against one another.

In other words, it is simply nonsense to say that the obviously mythical parts of the Bible—like the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, Moses, Joshua, Jonah and others—have now been proved to be literally true through excavation. They are still mythical.

Fifty Years Ago

RELIGION, of course, is the most admirable thing upon earth. When it is not admirable the Christian calls it by another name, superstition, and then thinks he has got over the difficulty. By religion he does not mean false religions, he will say. Yet when demolishing Atheists he will appeal to the universality of religion and speak as if the worst of religions was infinitely better than none at all. Fortunately each sect tries to prove that all other religions are inferior to its own, and thus they mutually expose each other's faults. Protestants expose the horrors and immoralities of the Romish Church and the Romish Church does its very best, or worst, to reciprocate the compliment.

Christianity has so distorted man's ideas of morality that the absurd vice of asceticism is regarded as a beautiful virtue, and even among Protestants the condemnation of the systematic enforcement of unnatural conditions of life is not as severe as the case merits. Protestants, in giving up the Romish form of Christian asceticism have usually adopted others, such as Sabbatarianism and other pious restrictions calculated to drive the natural man to vice and drink as a relief to the intolerable dullness and perpetual observances of straight-laced piety.

The "Freethinker," January 2, 1887.

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTIE

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Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

To Advertising and Distributing the *Freethinker*.—I. YETTER, 58.; Don Fisher, 48.

W. J. MEALOR, sending us his New Year's greetings, thinks that recent articles in the *Freethinker* should create "a greater interest in the paper than ever." We sincerely hope so. We are doing all we can at this end.

E. SYERS.—Next week.

S. MILLER.—Pitiable stuff for a teacher to send to his pupils. Such a teacher would have been better engaged cleaning the streets.

DOUGLAS SCOTT.—Many thanks for the work you are doing on behalf of the *Freethinker*. Sorry your last letter was overlooked, but if you knew the extent of our correspondence, and the amount of writing and other work we have to get through, you would realize that such "misses" are inevitable. Perhaps the next editor may have the luxury of a private secretary. He will need one. Papers are being sent.

JAMES MACLEOD.—Our statement concerning Polygamy and Christianity is strictly accurate. The exception of Timothy that a Bishop should be the "husband of one wife," would not have been necessary if monogamy had been the rule. These, indeed, are the views of even orthodox commentators.

I. NEWMAN.—Much obliged for new subscriber. Good wishes are heartily reciprocated.

E. PARIENTE.—Thanks for addresses of likely new readers. Paper being sent for four weeks.

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.

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One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

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

Sugar Plums

We have three weeks to the Paine Dinner at the Holborn Restaurant, on Saturday, January 23. The attendance will be strictly limited to 250, and we suggest to regular attendants that they should secure their tickets without delay. This is a dual function, combining the Annual Dinner with the commemoration of the bicentenary of Thomas Paine. Professor Laski and Mr. H. N. Brailsford will be among the speakers. There will be the usual musical entertainment. There will be a reception at 6.15, and dinner will be served at 6.45 sharp. Tickets are 8s. each, from either the *Freethinker* or the N.S.S. Offices.

We hope to publish the new edition of Paine's *Age of Reason* about January 10. The book covers 250 pages, including a 44-page introduction by Mr. Cohen. The price is fourpence in paper, with portrait wrapper, and one shilling and sixpence in cloth with portrait on plate paper. Postage in each case will be fourpence extra. It is the cheapest Freethought work ever issued. It is published at a loss, most of which has been met by the kindness of two or three friends. We invite orders, and for more than single copies, the additional copies to be distributed among Christian acquaintances. In its consequences the *Age of Reason* is one of the most noteworthy Freethinking works ever issued, and has been more frequently reprinted than any other single work issued during the nineteenth century.

Mr. Cohen desires to thank his numerous friends who have sent him seasonable greetings, and particularly those friends in India, China, America (North and South) Australia, and New Zealand, who were thoughtful enough to post in time for its arrival at somewhere near the appropriate date. The letters have been greatly appreciated.

We take this opportunity to remind members of the N.S.S. that all annual subscriptions fall due on January 1. The subscriptions are nominal; and it is left to each member to give what the inclinations and ability of members are inclined to give. There is always need for each doing what can be done. Members who feel inclined to take part in the distribution of the new edition of the *Age of Reason* may add the amount due to their subscriptions.

We are pleased to find the *Evening Standard* repeating what we have said for some time—namely, that those high-minded clergy of the Established Church, including the double-dealing Archbishop of Canterbury, who decline to perform the marriage service over divorced persons, are guilty of illegality and dishonesty. They are taking money for work which they decline to do. They are in exactly the same position as a Registrar of Marriages would be who continued to draw his salary while refusing to marry anyone with red hair. We are not questioning the right of any man to decline any work which he considers he ought not to do. But it takes a Christian parson to occupy a post for which he is highly paid, and to refuse to discharge the duties belonging to the post.

Mr. G. Whitehead speaks for the Glasgow Secular Society to-day (January 3), in the McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, on "Freethought and Dictators." The subject is topical, and should be interesting. Mr. Whitehead is well known in Glasgow, and the local saints will no doubt use every effort to see that the large and comfortable hall is well filled. The lecture begins at 7 p.m.

The North London Branch N.S.S. opens its second session at the Primrose Restaurant, 66 Heath Street, Hampstead, this evening (January 3) when Mr. R. H. Rosetti will speak on "Christianity and the Growth of Militarism." It is a long time since Mr. Rosetti last addressed a North London audience, and he hopes to meet old friends, some new ones, and courteous champions of the Prince of Peace. The lecture commences at 7.30 p.m.

Fireside Talks to my Children, by "The Armchair Philosopher" (A. H. Stockwell, Ltd., 1s. 6d.) is a publication which will interest Freethinkers. The talks are directed toward children in early adolescence, a time of life when the average parent is inclined to exercise a greater degree of care in his pronouncements, for not only are the points then raised by the children of great and often pressing importance to them, but the replies received are generally subjected to shrewd criticism, whether that criticism be expressed or unexpressed. The writer of these *Talks* is a good Freethinker, and because of that avoids the cardinal error of speaking with "authority." This much have I learnt, he says in effect, go you and learn better, the most admirable of all attitudes. Any criticism which rises to one's lips (particularly upon the subjects of sex, marriage, etc.), is stilled when this proviso is borne in mind. Almost any parent would write a different chapter under these headings, so important, rightly or wrongly, does he or she consider that particular views should be imbibed by the children. It is a great objective that the author is tackling; so great, and so necessary, that some day a work of genius will arrive on the subject. Meanwhile we can commend this straightforward brochure, for to be honest is a rare thing as this world goes, and to succeed in impressing this fact upon adolescence is valuable work. Freethinkers will find the work helpful, and in the majority of cases, one surmises, they will hand it over to their children without comment.

Swift's Little Joke

ONE of the best-known names in this country, in certain circles, is that of Old Moore. Every year he turns up with unfailing regularity, and thousands of people buy the famous work which keeps his name alive. Who he is—or was—is very little known, his identity seems as elusive as that of Mr. Keating. There are, of course—or have been—spurious Old Moores; it is impossible to devise a test these days by which one can ascertain the authentic gentleman unless it is that of waiting to see whether his prognostications have actually come to pass. Only the genuine Old Moore could possibly read the future truly.

There must be few people who have not seen a copy of Old Moore's famous Almanac. Even the hardened sceptic will have glanced at the coming year's predictions with amused tolerance. Have the stars really settled the course of future events? Or must certain things happen because the stars are in certain conjunctions? Astrology is an old, old science—if it ever was a science; people of antiquity believed in it; great men and women throughout the ages have believed in it; and in our own age of real science and discovery, it pays our great national newspapers to keep on their staff men and women who tell modern readers what the stars have in store for them.

The first old Moore was probably a real personage, who lived towards the end of the seventeenth century. At all events, it was a Francis Moore who published his *Kalendarium Ecclesiasticum* in 1699, and his *Vox Stellarum* or almanac in 1701. This came out year by year—and it was by no means a poor performance, graced, as it generally was, with poetry and a large number of advertisements, as well as with astonishing predictions. When Moore died, the almanac continued to appear, as it does to this day; no rival seems to have produced a diminished circulation or popularity.

Rivals there were, and in plenty; the most famous, in Francis Moore's day, being Dr. John Partridge. The doctorate degree was supposed to have been bestowed upon him by Leyden University; but it was probably assumed in much the same way as such titles as "Professor" or "Colonel" naturally precede the names of similar quacks who wish to be endowed with an air of authority not acquired by other means. Partridge was really a shoemaker, and though shoemakers are often Atheists—why, is not quite clear—in this particular case he must have found prophetic almanacs more remunerative than sticking to his last. He and his predictions would have sunk into a well-merited obscurity, but for a chance encounter with Swift. Like a flash, that brilliant genius seized the opportunity of "putting across" an important prognostication of his own. He must have felt the utmost contempt for the stupid prophecies in the current astrological almanacs, and he took the opportunity of presenting to the world a *jeu d'esprit*, almost unique in its own field.

He called it *Predictions for the Year 1708*, by *Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq.*, and in it he predicted, in the clearest manner, the death of Dr. John Partridge, on March 29 of that year.

Whether Partridge really believed in his own prognostications, or not, cannot, of course, be known for certain; but he undoubtedly was terribly frightened at Bickerstaff's prophecy. It is said "that he lived in terror till the day announced for his death was fairly past." However, when the fatal day had been left behind, and he found that nothing happened, he

"began to crow." He was delighted to find himself alive and wrote to an Irish friend:—

I don't doubt you are imposed upon in Ireland also, by a pack of rogues, about my being dead. . . . There is no such man as Bickerstaff; it is a sham name but his true name is Pettie; he is always in a garret, a cellar, or a gaol; and therefore you may, by that, judge what kind of a reputation this fellow hath to be credited in the world. . . . I thank God I am very well in health, and at the time he had doomed me to death I was not in the least out of order. The truth is, it was a high flight at a venture, hit or miss. He knows nothing of astrology.

And Partridge exultingly insisted that no man could tell better than himself that he was, at the moment of writing, very much alive.

Unfortunately, this Irish friend was also Swift's, who was immediately told of Partridge's exultation at being alive. So Swift promptly published another pamphlet professing to have written it the day after March 29, entitled, *The Accomplishment of the First of Mr. Bickerstaff's Predictions being an Account of the Death of Mr. Partridge, the Almanac Maker, upon the 29th instant, in a Letter to a Person of Honour*. This staggered poor Partridge, who vainly protested to all and sundry that he was alive; and he even got Dr. Yalden, preacher at Bridewell, "to draw up a full statement of his injuries and sufferings, to be laid before the public." It is not certain whether Partridge published the pamphlet drawn up in his name entitled, *Squire Bickerstaff Delected; or the Astrological Imposter Convicted*. In any case, Swift promptly followed his previous publication with another, *A Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq.*, in which he gravely proved, beyond all possible doubt, that his prediction was fulfilled to the letter. Among other reasons which he gave showing Partridge was really dead, were the following:—

I will plainly prove him to be dead, out of his own almanac for this year, and from the very passage which he produces to make us think him alive. He there says, he is not only now alive, but was also alive upon that very 29th of March, which I foretold he should die on; by this he declares his opinion that a man may be alive now who was not alive a twelve month ago. And indeed, there lies the sophistry of his argument. He dares not assert that he was alive ever since the 29th of March, but that he is now alive, and was so on that day: I grant the latter; for he did not die till night, as appears by the printed account of his death, in a letter, to a lord; and whether he be since revived I leave the world to judge. This, indeed, is perfect cavilling, and I am ashamed to dwell any longer upon it.

But Partridge refused to admit he was dead, and passionately contradicted again the story of his death in his almanac for 1710; and the result was a sarcastic correspondence in the *Tatler* on the subject, in which it was intimated that he would be finally buried on a certain day. The *Tatler* even published a letter from him from the banks of the Styx, and a characteristic reply from Swift, who felt inclined to call him back from the other world on account of some of his predictions having been written "in a true Protestant spirit of prophecy." Partridge continued to protest that he was alive, and that his almanac was the only true one, written by a living Partridge; and when he did die, in 1715, his widow continued for some years to publish the almanac. But Swift had other and graver matters on his hands, and so left them alone.

Reading some of the astrological drivel published these days—how one sighs for another Swift!

The Clergy as Propagandists of Freethought

HERE in Sydney (N.S.W., Australia) the papers would shrink from printing a line in frank criticism of religion. Still, there are abundant compensations. For example, in the reports they publish every Monday of the sermons delivered in the principal churches, together with other clerical happenings throughout the week. Let me begin my illustrations—all taken from the Sydney dailies of the one day (Monday, November 23)—with this:—

Canon H. N. Baker, preaching at St. Thomas's, North Sydney, said that modern psychology paid a great deal of attention to infantilism. It stated that very few people ever grew up on all sides of their being, and many remained in childhood's stage, either in intellect, emotions, or morals. Most persons exhibited very uneven development. This arrested development was a great hindrance in the way of integration into life. The New Testament warned against the danger of infantilism in spiritual things, and encouraged a striving to attain to the full-grown man.

But—why should the Rev. Baker complain about infantilism? If it were not for the fact that, in a religious way of speaking, very few people ever developed, the imposition of Christianity could never have been foisted on the world. The Rev. Baker deploras the one thing that keeps him in his job. Then, under the heading, "Universities—Warning by Priest," we have this:—

Monsignor J. Meany, speaking at a meeting at St. John's College, Sydney University, yesterday, said that it was a mystery to him how parents could be blind to the dangers of university education.

They were most particular about the outside contacts their children made, but Satan functioned not only as a bad character to be met in the ballroom or saloon or racecourse. He sometimes masqueraded under the cloak of a don, and paraded the cloisters of universities and spoke in classrooms. In practically every university they would find the anti-Christ, anti-God, anti-Bible, and the anti-moral professor. They were the shock troops who wore down the Catholic school and the Catholic home morals. Such professors masqueraded as intellectual and enlightened men and women and as broad-minded scientific thinkers.

The first reaction of the Catholic youngster to the irreligious professor was one of horror. Blasphemy gave him a migraine, but it went on and on, and a tolerance was built up. The silky-voiced instructors said "There is no God." The Atheist university was spiritual cyanide. If there was poison in the atmosphere of their university, the home was one of the antidotes. It was the best of educators, but only when it was a good one. Parents could never wholly divest themselves of their divinely imposed duties, even if they were to send their children to the very College of Cardinals.

Societies within the University helped, and companions banded together often did much to bring about what was a miracle of saving grace, the student who came through a modern university unscathed.

Yes; in Monsignor Meany's own words, there are dangers in a university education—to the church. "Satan functioned not only as a bad character to be met in the ballroom or saloon or racecourse." Fancy such truck being served up, in the hope of terrifying any present-day, enlightened youth! Still, it is gratifying to hear—from the monsignor himself—that "in practically every university they would find the anti-Christ, anti-God, anti-Bible" professor. Next:—

The Rev. Father Osmund, C.P., at St. Mary's Cathedral, said that there was a tendency among Christians to belittle the power and influence which Satan, by God's permission, exercised. Catholic doctrine on the point was precise and definite. Satan, though a fallen angel, still possessed angelic intelligence, and was capable of achieving results which were normally outside the range of human endeavour. Satan was desirous of imitating Christ in order to lead souls away from Him. Satan exercised authority over the evil minds of men. The influence over the minds of men began with his victory over their First Parents, and all sinners who did his will became his servants. The tremendous power exercised by the spirit of darkness was broken, however, by the victory of the Cross. Satan was determined always to make a last effort to thwart God's designs for the salvation of mankind.

Clearly, Satan is a very real, active character. But God, the creator of all things, must necessarily have created Satan; and God, the omnipotent, can just as surely and swiftly destroy Satan. Why doesn't He do so? Ah, there's the trick. If God put an end to Satan—or, if Satan dropped out of the scheme of things—gone, from that moment, would be the occupation of the clergy. Consequently, Satan must be retained at all costs—presented and paraded to keep up the religious show. Come, now, to a wail of another sort:—

"It is almost unbelievable that, in a town of such importance as Narrandera, there are men who have never seen a Bible," said Mr. C. A. White, an official of the Postal Sunday School Movement, conducted from Sydney.

He was speaking at the half-yearly meeting of the movement last night.

After attending a religious meeting at Narrandera," he said "one man confessed to me that it was the first time he had heard the Bible read. In almost any town in the country there are people who cannot direct a stranger to any church. People have the idea that it is a good thing to work up enthusiasm over foreign missions. I want to tell them that, almost at the door of Sydney, there are heathen people."

The chairman (Mr. J. B. Nicholson) said that 60 per cent of the children attending the State schools had no Bible in their homes.

There was, of course, a lot more than Mr. White could have said—for instance, regarding Narrandera. I am sure that he found, in the locality where that town is situated, the sun rises and shines, the rains fall, the crops grow, and that the people there—in point of conduct—are at least the equal of those in the most Bible-deluged community that it is within his power to name. Why, then, worry about the Bible being more-or-less unknown in Narrandera? The residents of that town—in every phase of life—are not a bit the worse off for the absence of it. Finally, we have this:—

While Archbishop and Mrs. Mowll were asleep at Bishops court, Dailing Point, last night, a cat burglar stole jewellery worth £200 from their room.

A gold watch and chain that had been presented to Archbishop Mowll, and a gold watch which had been given to his wife, with other gold articles, were taken from different places in the room.

The pockets of the Archbishop's trousers had been picked; but the thief got no money.

Before coming to Sydney the Archbishop was in China. In his preachings here, he has again and again cited instances of what he declared to be Divine interventions in that country, in the way of protecting him from the dangers that surrounded him. Why did the Lord fail him in this case? Yet the Archbishop will continue—presumably as long as his handsome stipend is forthcoming—to urge

others to trust themselves to a Keeper, regardless of the fact that his own trust in that very same Keeper has been so completely frustrated.

What is the effect of items such as the whole of the foregoing, published from week to week in papers with a total circulation that runs into hundreds of thousands?

More and more must the community share in the impressions that I have here given in the shape of brief comments. In this way, the papers—professedly religious though they be—are doing a great Freethought-propaganda service. Fundamentally, however, it is to the clergy themselves that our greatest thanks are due. Such are the fatuities and futilities they are for ever streaming forth that—when widely recorded through the papers—the only result must be to increasingly discredit the beliefs that they seek to expound.

J. Y. ANDERONEY

Sydney, N.S.W., Australia.

Come Let Us Anew

THE Christian Watch Night Service lingers rather agreeably in the memory. There is more humanity in it than in most Christian ceremonies. A feeling seems to be afoot on this occasion that dogma must be kept in the background; that no "religion" is going to be unloosed for this one performance. All leads up to the dramatic moment, the first stroke of twelve, midnight. "Come let us Anew," is then exuded with zest. Then the attendants realize that they have got it over and can now be natural. Fusillades of handshakes and "Happy New Years" pass from one to another; even osculation is felt to be permissible between Edwin and Angelina. Altogether, a breeze of real human feeling is released amongst a set of people accustomed to the stifling atmosphere of spiritual oppression that they experience inside a Church.

One or two of these watch-night services linger in the memory. One recollects a lost and untidy Aire-dale, which needed warmth, finding its way into chapel one New Year's Eve. It walked sedately down the aisle and sat to attention in full view of the congregation. It behaved itself with due decorum through a prayer or two, a short address and a hymn. Then, just before midnight, the two minutes' silence was announced. I think this is still designated by courtesy "Two Minutes' Silent Prayer." Canine sagacity failed however at this critical moment; probably the unusual quiet alarmed the dog. After thirty seconds of the interval, it threw its head back and howled to the God of Dogs. A couple of bewildered stewards put in appearance and made overtures, which took the form of throwing their arms up and down in the air. The amusement of those deeply engaged in the operation of prayer took an audible form, and the dog at once became quiet. Then the stewards ceased importuning and silent prayer was resumed, with the result that at Ten Seconds to Twelve another sharp series of most appalling howls rent the air. Changes are appreciated by almost everyone, and that watch-night service was, on a majority vote, ruled a huge success.

The very last Watch-Night Service attended by the writer, was in the same building. The Minister does not usually occupy the pulpit on these occasions, but comes down to say his piece from, what is called, the communion rail. At seven minutes to twelve, he called upon Brother Wilkinson to offer up a prayer of five minutes duration, "the prayer to be followed by two minutes *silent* prayer."

Now Brother Wilkinson, it happened, had gone through business vicissitudes during that year. Not content with the financial yield realized from his little confectionery business, he had become enterprising and had branched out, with the help of a Godly bricklayer (if there be such a being), into speculative building, one of those lines into which, he no doubt felt, a little godliness could be imported with advantage. On its financial side, however, Brother Wilkinson was undoubtedly feeling his venture to be very trying. So he conjured High Olympus. His terms were conventional enough at first; soon it became evident that he was a man of one idea. In fair, round, terms he supplicated that the Lord in his mercy would see to it that the New Year was a year of prosperity. The word "prosperity" was used with tiresome iteration, and all its synonyms were drawn upon. Obvious it was that Brother Wilkinson feared the issue of his experimentation in bricks and mortar, and wished to have the Lord on his side as an active partner. An objective of this kind naturally leads to fervour and eloquence, and Brother Wilkinson showed both. It also leads to concentration. What was the Striking of the Hour to him at that moment? A mere vulgar piece of entertainment free from pecuniary significance. Besides five minutes was a ridiculous allowance for a man in which to get *en rapport* with his Maker. So it happened that in five minutes Brother Wilkinson was just warming up. He was certainly exhibiting real eloquence, but there was little sign of his approaching a crescendo.

The Minister kneeling at the Communion Rail, in spite of being absorbed in his devotions, had been showing marks of agitation, developing, as time went on, into signs of real distress. However important Wilkinson's Bank Account might be, it must not, in all reverence, be allowed to interfere with the evening's High Spot. He wriggled, he shuffled, he looked at his watch several times through his closed eyes. The devout congregation, also, was on tenterhooks. Was that old jerrybuilder, Wilkinson, going to be allowed to spoil their Night Out?

Then the Reverend Josiah Giblett grasped the situation. It called, he felt, for a Man of Action. He rose and left the Communion Rail, and, with cat-like tread, the praying devout being his wide-eyed spectators, he made his way up the aisle until he reached the lay brother. He arrived at a point where an effective rear-guard action was possible, and just as that fervent believer was on the point of hysteria.

"We again beseech Thee, Good Lord, that the coming year may be a prosperous year, a very prosperous year, a year that will live in our memories and make your humble servants rejoice. May next year. . . ."

Then the humble one felt his coat tails pulled vigorously.

"For Christ's sake, Amen," he blurted out, and sat down. He had correctly diagnosed the situation, but just on time. The jerk had brought him rudely to earth.

"Hurrah," said the congregation, but inaudibly. Boom, went the Clock.

The Reverend Josiah got back to his seat somehow. He had saved the situation, hardly, perhaps, with dignity, but that was his affair. His sympathetic flock would understand and make allowances.

And now, strike up, you, there, at the Organ! :—

Come let us anew
Our journey pursue,
Roll round with the year,
And never stand still till the Master appear.

"A Happy New Year, Mrs. Bloggs." "Same to you, Sir, I'm sure." "Happy New Year, Father." "Happy New Year, George." "Winnie," says Tommy, "Come over here." "What do you want, Tommy?"

Ah, even Godliness cannot crush out all our humanity. Thank God, it breaks through.

T. H. ELSTON.

Christ or Chaos?

A SALVATION ARMY officer preached the sermon at a service in St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh, and he said that there were only two alternatives before the world—Christ or Chaos. The orators of the "Blood and Fire" order are notorious for their glib tongues off which come trippingly their stock in trade slogans. But the warriors' pronouncement seems to call for some examination. "Chaos," according to the Dictionary means shapeless mass—disorder—the state of matter before it was reduced to order by the creator. The last is no doubt the signification that this preacher had particularly in mind. But can anyone tell what the condition of matter was before its reduction to order by the Creator? And one had supposed that religionists were concerned not so much about matter, which they usually affect to belittle and despise, but about Spirit which they regard as the only permanently influential thing.

The picture of God seated above, and firstly with a wave of his hand making the Earth out of nothing; and then with another wave settling the mountains, the courses of the rivers and the succession of the seasons is a highly fantastic one to any reasonable thinker. It no doubt impressed primitive intelligences who believed that this Earth was the Universe in itself with the Sun, Moon and Stars for its illumination. But it will not fit in with what by human investigation we now know of the planetary system. The retention, or professed retention, by believing Christians of the belief that God created and settled the conditions of the Earth in the manner described in the Book of Genesis suggests that their minds are in a chaotic state. So that it would seem more appropriate to talk of Christ and chaos than of Christ or Chaos.

But in the Christian scheme, mind must be subordinated to mysticism. The Brigadiers of the Salvation Army are not concerned about your mind—it can be as chaotic as you please; it is what they call your "immortal spirit" that they say they want to save. They will also look after your savings for you and offer you board and lodgings on competitive terms. Their idea of the establishment of God's Kingdom on Earth is that we should all be wearing scarlet jerseys and residing in Salvation Army Hostels. They advertise by placard that they want the world for God—in other words, that everybody should be in the Army, and that all buildings and commodities should be under its possession and control. Then would be an end of chaos, for Jesus would have come into his own! Jesus has been metamorphosed in various ways to meet the schemes of various religious organizations. English Church Missionaries had him represented in books they distributed in India as a top-hatted, frock-coated commanding-looking Britisher. In the minds of Salvationists he is conceived as garbed in their Army's uniform—scarlet jersey and all!

In Ancient Greece there were people who were always interested in hearing of some new thing. It

is equally true that in Britain there are many people who are only to be caught by novelty. So for the purpose of bolstering-up a decadent faith we have had in the last fifty years numerous instances of new, fancy and freak religions springing up fungus-like in our midst. In chaotic succession have appeared Spiritualism, the Salvation Army, Christian Science and The Four Square Gospel. They have the same troubles in America on a larger scale. But the Salvation Army has probably been the most astute in its propaganda, for it has realized the value of the big drum, the brass band, tambourines, cymbals and pretty girls as shooters of its draw-nets. And it has drummed and shouted to such purpose that it has actually been taken to the bosom of the old established Church, which formerly frowned upon it! No doubt there has been a tacit pact or "gentleman's agreement," by which it is honourably understood that the Army claims no monopoly in its converts, who are at liberty to identify themselves with any other religious organization they may choose. And the old-established Church, feeling the draught caused by defections from it, has been fain to receive as an ally a body which it once held in contempt, and whose method it sternly condemned! Misfortune finds for us strange bedfellows.

But where in all the blatant propaganda of the Salvation Army do we find any grounds for believing that it can bring order out of chaos? The whole theological world is in a state of chaos! That being so, it should set its own house in order before pretending to regulate other people's, and lay to heart the maxim: "Example is better than precept."

IGNOTUS.

WHO IS THIS MAN?

The man that named our Country United States of America.

The man first to advocate independence for our country.

The man who did more to achieve this independence than any other man, giving his pen, tongue, sword, and pocket-book to the cause.

The man that in the darkest hour of the Revolution wrote the CRISIS, commencing with the words, "These are the times that try men's souls."

Do you know that General Washington ordered this mighty work to be read to the Army once a week? The man who was joint author of the Declaration of Independence with Jefferson.

The man who borrowed ten million dollars from Louis XVI. to feed and clothe the American Army.

The man that established the Bank of North America in order to supply the Army.

Napoleon said, in toasting him at a banquet, "Every city in the world should erect a gold statue to you."

The Author of *The Rights of Man* acknowledged to be the greatest work ever written on political freedom.

This masterpiece gave free speech and a free press to England and America.

The man that first said: "The world is my Country, and to do good is my religion."

The man known as "The Great Commoner of Mankind," the "Founder of the Republic of the World."

The man first to urge the making of our Constitution.

The man first to suggest the Federal Union of the States, and to bring it about.

The man first to propose the Louisiana Purchase.

The man first to demand Justice for Women.

The man first to plead for the dumb animals.

The man first to advocate International Arbitration.

The man first to propose Old Age Pensions.

The man first to propose "The land for the people."

The man that invented and built the first iron bridge. That man was Thomas Paine.

Belief is Universal

CHRISTIAN: "The fact of the belief in God and immortality being universal leads me to the conclusion that it is true. It is a human instinct."

Sceptic: "The belief is not universal. Millions deny it completely."

C.: "Then you contend that the craving for religion is not a human instinct?"

S.: "I do. The so-called religious instinct is a product of environment and tuition."

C.: "What is your evidence?"

S.: "Religion undoubtedly originated among uncivilized people who owing to their lack of knowledge, were overawed by the convulsions of nature and not unnaturally concluded they were caused by an enraged deity. The religion of to-day is its lineal descendant having been preserved from extinction by the influence of an interested and powerful priesthood. Religion having been founded upon a mistaken interpretation of nature, and sustained by priestcraft, it seems to me that what you term the religious instinct would be more correctly described if you called it a specious fallacy. It bears no resemblance to, say, the inextinguishable instinct of self-preservation."

C.: "I cannot accept this view. Even if religion were not instilled into the mind of man by parents and priests he would still possess the instinct. He has a predisposition to accept it."

S.: "I do not agree. If he were freed from priestly influence, while retaining his natural interest in the laws of nature, religion, in its generally accepted sense, would find no place in his composition. The colossal conceit of the Churches claiming to have solved the riddle of the universe would merely amuse him."

C.: "It would interest me to learn how you arrive at this conclusion."

S.: "I live in a remote part of England, where grotesque superstitions unknown in other parts of the country are believed implicitly because they have been instilled into the minds of the people from their childhood. When strangers either smile sceptically or ridicule openly these myths the surprise of the natives is evident. Despite their disbelief in the local superstitions many of these strangers believe unreservedly in the more popular superstitions, such as the alleged dangers associated with the first glimpse of a new moon through glass, and making one of thirteen at a gathering, because they also have been taught them from their infancy. It might be said that belief in these several superstitions is a human instinct—it is often as strongly marked as belief in religion—though it is obvious it is wholly a product of environment and early tuition. If intelligent people heard of them for the first time comparatively late in their lives, they would not fail to reject them in a chorus of derision. You have no solid foundation for saying they would not treat religion in the same way in similar circumstances."

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LONDON

OUTDOOR

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

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 3.30, Sunday, Messrs. Bryant, Evans, Barnes and Tuson. *Freethinker* on sale at the Kiosk. Should be ordered in advance to avoid disappointment. *Freethinker* and *Spain and the Church* on sale outside the Park gates.

INDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Primrose Restaurant, 66, Heath Street, Hampstead, N.W.3, one minute from Hampstead Underground Station): 7.30, Mr. R. H. Rosetti—"Christianity and the Growth of Militarism."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, Professor F. Aveling, D.Sc.—"The Problem of the Will in Recent Psychology."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Alexandra Hotel, South Side, Clapham Common, S.W.4, opposite Clapham Common Station, Underground): 7.30, Mr. R. Flaxman (Catholic Evidence Guild)—"The Existence of God."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W): 7.30, Friday, January 8, Debate—"Is Organic Evolution an Idle Tale?" *Affir.*: Capt. B. Acworth, D.S.O., Evolution Protest Movement. *Neg.*: T. F. Palmer, N.S.S.

COUNTRY

INDOOR.

BURNLEY (St. James' Hall, Burnley, Womens' Section S.D.F.): 7.30, Monday, January 4, Mr. J. Clayton—"The Meaning of Freethought."

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"And Man Made God in His own Image."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, Mr. G. Whitehead (London)—"Freethought and Dictatorships."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Transport Hall, entrance in Christian Street, Islington, Liverpool): 7.0, G. H. Taylor—"Stifling Faith."

PRESTON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hesketh Buildings, entrance Ormskirk Road): 7.30, Branch Meeting.

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