

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED *by* CHAPMAN COHEN •

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

Views and Opinions

God and Gresford

DURING the discussion in the House of Commons on the Gresford mine disaster, the Secretary for Mines, Captain Crookshank, in reply to criticism said, "the Government can only try to prevent such disasters, but there were such things as acts of God." It is almost refreshing to find God figuring in a discussion in the Commons. Once upon a time it was usual, but it is now confined to such semi-religious things as discussions on blasphemy laws, Sunday observance, and revision of the prayer-book. It appears, of course, annually in the archaic custom of the King delivering a speech as his own, but that pretence is about as persuasive as is the daily prayer of the chaplain that the members present may be blessed with wisdom and understanding. After that prayer the House divides itself into two parties, one of which tries to prove that this miracle has already been accomplished, the other that not even God Almighty can work so mighty a transformation.

It must be admitted that the present Government has with it such men as Mr. Baldwin and his pal the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Captain Crookshank's remark may have been based on information from "above." But no member asked for information as to its source, or even that it might be issued as a white paper and be made a subject for discussion. Still, if it is true that God does take it into his head (if it is not blasphemous to suggest that God has anything so solid as a head) to occasionally blow up a mine, the outlook is rather disturbing. It is a source of danger against which none can guard. And if accepted with all its implications, we imagine that insurance companies might decline to pay out, and the thoughtfulness of a man for his dependants would come to naught. For the one circumstance which leads insurance companies to recognize "acts of God" is the explosive aspects of God's activities. They will insure against, fire or sickness, against the weather, or against trade fluctuations, but they bar "acts of God."

God is too incalculable. They resemble the mother who says of her very unruly offspring: "There's no knowing what the varmint is going to do next!"

* * *

God and the Left Wing

But there is one person in the House of Commons who appears to have more precise information about God's actions than has the Secretary for Mines. This is Sir Stafford Cripps. He did not suggest an enquiry by way of considering the possibility of Captain Crookshank being right; he did not ask what authority the Captain had for his statement. Neither did he suggest that if the statement made was correct, the Government should consider breaking off diplomatic relations as expressed in the presence of a chaplain in the House, the maintenance of blasphemy laws, Sunday laws, etc., until an apology was made for such conduct. He simply said, plainly and categorically, "God doesn't make explosions." To be quite just to both parties it must be pointed out that Sir Stafford Cripps was as uncommunicative as Captain Crookshank concerning the source of his information. He did not say whether it was the Left Wing of the Labour Party that had decided that while God might do a deal of blowing up in other directions, he did not make explosions in mines. Neither did he say that his informant was Mr. Lansbury, whose God is a very amiable kind of a party, or Sir Thomas Inskip, whose God would be inclined to blow up anything if he found people attending cinemas on Sunday instead of going to Church. Sir Stafford denied God's destructive activities in explosions. He left it an open question whether he might not send storms and the Bench of Bishops, measles and Methodists, epidemics and Archbishops. He simply drew the line at explosions. Sir Stafford Cripps evidently thinks there are limits, even for God Almighty.

* * *

A Puzzling Situation

So far so good. But of the two witnesses cited, one is too uncertain and the other is too negative for a decisive judgment to be passed. The way is opened for no effective course of action. In fact it suggests some danger in doing anything at all, and sounds as though action may actually involve danger. When the Government failed to please Mussolini in one direction he at once began to operate in another. We would not satisfy him in Abyssinia, so he tried a move against us in the Mediterranean. And it is just possible that if we were to take adequate precautions against God blowing up mines, he might get level with us in other directions where we were not so much upon our guard. It will be remembered that Hamlet sneered at politicians who would outwit God, and Captain Crookshank is well-advised in being very cautious that in deciding on the question of the Gresford explosions he does not commit the blunder against which Hamlet warned him and his kind. Moreover, it is often

found good policy to give a mischievous boy some latitude in his taste for destruction, lest he should do something really very serious. The same might be correct of God, who, Mr. W. H. Mallock said, judging by his works, resembled nothing so much as a "mischievous larrikin, not meaning to do ill, but quite careless whether he did it or not." Blocked in his amusement of causing explosions in mines, God might take up with the game of blowing up gasometers or bringing about another war. Very high ecclesiastical authorities warn us that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God, and it is probably a very much more serious matter to fall into the hands of an angry one. The position is really a very serious one, and the Government, while it is justified in moving with caution, might do well if it took advice on the matter.

It cannot be denied that Sir Stafford Cripps, who did not deny that God might do some very unpleasant things, and Captain Crookshank, who affirmed that he did, are historically on rather solid ground. There is a great amount of testimony that God has caused explosions, sent diseases, floods, earthquakes, struck men with blindness or drove them mad in order to call the attention of the world to his existence. The prayer-book of that church to which the Archbishop of Canterbury is inviting us to return, very plainly implies that this is so, for there are special prayers asking God to be merciful and not afflict us with the things named. If the phrase is permissible, God has often played the very devil with human plans and with human beings. I know too little of God's ways to say that he did or did not blow up the Gresford mine, but if he did the number then killed was very small compared with those he is said to have slaughtered on other occasions and by other kinds of explosions.

* * *

Let Us be Careful

Sir Stafford Cripps and the Secretary for Mines have raised a very important question. One of these gentlemen tells us what God does, the other tells us what he does not. But both these answers raise the deeper question, What is it that God does? For we are assured that God, like Soviet Russia and Mr. Anthony Eden, has a plan. And as we are further told that it is our duty to help God in carrying out that plan, we cannot do so with confidence until we are sure what the plan is that God is working out. Captain Crookshank suggests that it may have been part of God's plan to blow up the Gresford mine, and is properly cautious about doing anything with regard to mineowners and managers. The Archbishop of Canterbury says we must work to realize the purpose of God. But how can we do this if we may, quite innocently, be working against God instead of with him? When the Secretary for Mines darkly suggests, with special reference to the Gresford explosion, "there are such things as acts of God," he is plainly fearful whether in passing condemnation we might not be passing judgment on God. And when Sir Stafford Cripps says that had the various acts dealing with mines been carried out properly, the explosion would not have occurred, Captain Crookshank might well reply that but for these meddlesome acts God would have blown up the mine long ago, and that the nation is suffering in other directions because we have interfered with God's purpose with reference to the mine. It may even be that the Government would be well advised not to be in too great a hurry to condemn the managers of the Gresford mine. For if that explosion was really an act of God, then it is all part of God's plan, and even an implied condemnation of it might have serious consequences. One must be very careful when playing with dynamite.

Why Not a Royal Commission?

There is a yet more fundamental issue involved. This is the larger and deeper question, what is it that God does? After all there is a deal of time and money spent on him. There should be some justification for this. Sir Stafford Cripps offers us a mere negative conclusion. He only tells us what God does not do. The Secretary for Mines is more positive, but seems to limit God's activities to explosions, and it is just possible that the official representatives of God on earth will deny this. The weather, the incidence of disease, the fertility of the soil, the protection of the country against attack, with all other knowable things, seem to be matters quite apart from God, and even the King seems to place more reliance upon having his mother by his side than having God with him. The whole situation seems to be a jumble of incongruities, with God the greatest incongruity of all. We maintain more than thirty thousand parsons on the assumption that God does something, and we permit Atheists to live on the probability that he does nothing. We advocate the practice of prayer because it is possible that God will do something in answer to our petitions, and we advise all sorts of precautions in case he does nothing or is not interested in our petitions. We say that our defence is God, but arrange a fifteen hundred million armament vote in case God should happen to defend someone else against us. We make the King swear to protect the God of Protestantism in this country, and risk the disfavour of God by not caring a damn whether in the rest of the Empire He is protected or not. The Archbishop of Canterbury holds a meeting in the House of Commons to implore people to get back to God, but does not tell the members what God we are to get back to, or what he will do for us if the members do get back to him.

I suggest the advisability of appointing a Royal Commission to consider what it is that God does, so that our efforts may be properly co-ordinated. If God exists he ought to be doing something. And if he does anything we ought to be able to find out what it is. It is stupid to say that God will help us if we help ourselves. If we help ourselves the trick is done and the help of God is unnecessary. If the findings were negative we might be able to save a sum of money equal to the whole cost of the new armament plan; and if they were positive we might spend the money on getting a few hundred thousand more parsons, and rigidly suppress all forms of unbelief. If the Commission merely settled the issue between Sir Stafford Cripps and Captain Crookshank it would be something accomplished. But something ought to be done.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

HEREDITARY RULE

We have heard the *Rights of Man* called a levelling system; but the only system to which the term levelling is truly applicable is the hereditary monarchial system. It is a system of mental levelling. It indiscriminately admits every species of character to the same authority. Vice and virtue, ignorance and wisdom, in short, every quality, good or bad is put on the same level. Kings succeed each other, not as rationals, but as animals. It signifies not what their mental or moral characters are. . . . It has no fixed character. To-day it is one thing; to-morrow it is something else. It changes with the temper of each succeeding individual, and is subject to all the varieties of each. It is government through the medium of passions and accidents. It appears under all the various characters, childhood, decrepitude, dotage, a thing in leading-strings or in crutches. It reverses the wholesome order of nature. It occasionally puts children over men, and the conceits of non-age over wisdom and experience. In short we cannot conceive a more ridiculous figure of government, than hereditary succession in all its cases presents.

Thomas Paine, "*The Rights of Man*."

"Catching Them Young"

"The lie at the lips of the priest."—*Swinburne*.

"Power has been hitherto occupied in no employment but in keeping down Wisdom. The time may come when Wisdom shall exert her energy in repressing the sallies of Power."—*Landor*.

EDUCATION, in this country, has been seriously hampered by the desire of the clergy of all denominations, of whom there are forty thousand, to ally their religious teaching with the ordinary school programme. This desire has been further complicated by the dissensions among the clergy themselves. For, like other tradesmen, there is bitter rivalry among the sects. The teachings of the Established Church are considered by the Nonconformists to be wrong and harmful, whilst the instruction given by Dissenters is pronounced by Churchmen to be heretical and damnable. Roman Catholics, in their turn, consider that Anglicans and Free Churchmen are alike so monstrous, they must provide Romanist education. Jewish people also have their own schools. Churchmen and Nonconformists, however, both wish to keep the money in the family, and both agree that the Christian Bible be read in the schools, but that no definite theological doctrines be taught. This pleasant little trick is what is called "the compromise," and although it satisfies most of the clergy, who use it as the thin edge of the wedge, it still impedes education and fetters progress. For the clergy are astute enough to realize that so long as their particular fetish-book is forced upon the children of this country during the most impressionable years of their lives, their own comfortable position as a clerical caste apart is quite safe, and their bread will be buttered for another generation.

There are six million children in the elementary schools in this country, and three million of these are being educated in State-aided Church-of-England schools, where much more theology is taught than simple Bible reading. In all the schools, however, the scholars are taught to revere the scriptures and to respect the clergy, but in the Church schools the primary object is to manufacture young Anglicans as cheaply as possible. This is undeniable, for Church schools are the worst equipped and the most badly staffed in the whole country. As the standard of education in the State Schools is nothing to be proud of, this is a severe reflection on the Church of England clergy, who are primarily responsible. Indeed, they never really cared for education for the working-class, other than purely religious instruction, for, after nearly two thousand years of priestly control this England of ours was so largely illiterate that the State had to enforce, as late as 1870, free education for all.

So far as the Christian Bible is concerned, there are grave reasons why this fetish-book should have no official place in the national school programme. Its educational value is absolutely out-of-date, and comes to us as a savage survival from barbarous times. Let there be no mistake on this point. What do our kindergarten teachers, for instance, make of such Biblical advice as "a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding"; "Thou shalt beat him with a rod"; "Chasten thy son, and let not thy soul spare for his crying"? Such Scriptural injunctions may be religious teaching, and may receive the blessing and approbation of forty thousand clergymen, but they remain the essence of barbarism, and are out of harmony with twentieth-century humanitarian ideas.

In fact, education is frustrated and retarded at every turn by this teaching of ancient ignorance and worse, to young people, both at the Universities and the public schools. At the other end of the social scale the unfortunate pupils in the elementary schools are

only semi-literate, but they are taught to revere every page of the Christian fetish-book, and to respect the clergy. In thousands of State-aided elementary schools the teaching is definitely sectarian, and children are stuffed with Oriental legend rather than the culture of the twentieth century. The result is that the rising generation is not even half-educated in the modern sense. Heads of business colleges say that pupils from elementary schools have great difficulty with shorthand because their spelling is so defective. So obstructive is clerical influence that after sixty-six years of State-enforced education the results are so entirely unsatisfactory that the majority of the nation is innocent of culture.

The trouble is that priests, as a body, do not want an educated democracy. The clergy themselves are not really educated, but are only educated in the patter of their sorry profession. They may have a smattering of dead languages, and knowledge of a dying creed, but they know next to nothing of science or of European culture. Even when they use a scientific vocabulary, it is of no more real value than a quack doctor's use of medical terms, "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Intellectually these charlatans are cave-men, and of no more actual importance than their savage prototypes in barbarian nations. The resemblance is far from superficial. Both chatter of gods who get angry, of a frightful devil, and use fear as a lever to quell opposition. And both are not too proud to receive the offerings of the faithful, and the leaders are fond of gaudy and distinctive dress. There is a resemblance also in the mentality of the worshippers, for it is hard to discriminate between the tom-toms of the savages and the big drums, tambourines and trombones of the Church and the Salvation Armies. And one mob is composed of pure savages, while the other mob has inherited two thousand years of Christian culture, and is none the better for it.

"What are we to put in its place?" ask the priestly defenders of the Christian Bible. What, indeed! The apologists talk as if it were a mere question of exchanging the Old and New Testament for the Koran, the Book of Mormon, or Swedenborg's alleged revelations. It is not a matter of substituting one so-called sacred book for another. The advocates of Secular education have the philosophy and literature of all the world to choose from. They can point to the teaching of Marcus Aurelius, one of the finest characters in all history; the ethics of Gotama Buddha; the wisdom of Confucius; and gain self-respect from Emerson. All the world's masterpieces of art, literature, and music, are freely available. Is this not a wider choice than the ravings of Semitic prophets, the borrowed mythology of Palestine, and the monastic nonsense of the Christian Fathers? For as Francis Bacon has pointed out "it were better to have no opinion of God at all than such an opinion as is unworthy."

The best way to begin to attempt to cure this evil of Priestcraft is to disestablish and disendow the State Church. So far as disestablishment is concerned, there are precedents. The old Liberal Party, although composed of Nonconformists, was instrumental in dealing with both the Irish and Welsh Churches; the priests got away with the loot. Next time, disestablishment must be associated with disendowment, and the ill-gotten funds of this Anglican Church devoted to national objects, and not to the perpetuation of an Oriental superstition and the provision of comfortable jobs for an army of charlatans. As things stand, this State-supported Church is actually getting richer, for the value of its landed property has increased enormously during the past two decades. And, ironically, the nearer this sectarian body approaches severance from the State the richer it be-

comes. Hence it is increasingly necessary that this Church should not, in the event of disestablishment, be in a position to continue its malpractices entrenched behind mountains of money. Priestcraft is, in its very essence, mischievous, and must be attacked in its most vulnerable part. It has so interwoven itself in the body politic that it will be a task of real magnitude to dislodge it. Democrats must realize that no new society of the future can ever come into being in this country whilst forty thousand priests control millions of money for the furtherance at all costs of the absurdities and barbarities of ancient ignorance, and for the hindrance of all progress.

"New occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient good uncouth,
They must upward still and onward, who would keep abreast
of truth. . . .
Nor attempt the Future's portal with the Past's blood-rusted
key."

MIMNERMUS.

The Christian Virtues

FRANK SWINNERTON has just been informing the Sunday press that Sir Philip Gibbs is a worthy representative of the Christian Virtues. Mr. Swinnerton, who by no means uses words carelessly when writing serious literature, probably writes for the Sunday press in the way he feels the Sunday press expects him to write. We have no desire to minimize the good feeling that lies behind Mr. Swinnerton's expression of opinion; less still are we inclined to quarrel with the thesis he wishes to "put over," which is that Sir Philip Gibbs is a highly admirable person. What we are inclined to urge is that the recipient of compliments might have been as well satisfied, perhaps more satisfied, if described as a compendium of the plain virtues instead of the coloured, or Christian, variety.

When a person is described as being liberally endowed with the virtues we know, roughly, what to expect from that person. But when we are told that he is renowned for his Christian virtues, we have only the faintest idea of that person's qualities. Mr. Swinnerton's adjective does not add to our information; it diminishes it. Why, on an occasion when he wishes to express adequately and worthily his admiration of a fellow human being, does he fall into the use of terms which only avoid the description of commonplace because they beggar description?

Now, what do we know about Sir Philip Gibbs because of this label attached to him? Can we at least say that he attends Church with regularity or irregularity and is scrupulous in the observance of his religious exercises? May he not be one of those who have a contempt for Temples made with hands, and "worship God in spirit and in truth"? May he not even be a *Christian Atheist*, as Charles Bradlaugh and others of his type have been meanly accused of being? Is he one of that Christian school which holds "cauld morality" to be as filthy rags? Does he put in the foreground the destination of his immortal soul, or does he interest himself in "one world at a time"? Is he one of those Christians whose religion consists of following (at a substantial distance) the "simple teaching of Jesus," which is found sometimes to be complex and invariably to coincide in the long run with what they themselves consider to be an appropriate general attitude? Or does he attend Communion or Mass or Confession a minimum number of times per year because he is informed by representatives of God that the omission to do so is no Christian virtue, but on the contrary, a very grievous and unforgivable sin? Does he remember the Sabbath Day

to keep it gloomy—a virtue of magnitude to a good Presbyterian—or is he of that Christian virtue so bereft that he does a little light gardening on Sunday, or listens-in to Luxembourg, or even joins the children in a game of tiddley-winks?

The *Daily Mail* tells us that if we have the Christian Virtues sufficiently at heart we must line up with Franco against the Spanish rabble. The Dean of Canterbury finds the Christian Virtues very much to the fore in Soviet Russia. The papal official organ, the *Osservatore Romano*, informs us that the Abyssinians showed the detestable characteristic of wishing to keep for themselves their own natural riches. This was a habit so deplorable to other (but not so old) Christian nations that Italian troops left for Africa to impress upon Ethiopia, out of their surplus or unusable stock, a more sensible Christian ethic. This involved the use of "poison gas," but, in spite of that, it became a piece of colonization which impressed this Branch of the Church as possessing "great beauty and profound and undying fascination." These instances are of our own time. We refrain from making unseemly back references to the Crusades, the Inquisition, or the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. We find this habit of rummaging hurts people's feelings, and is only indulged in by persons devoid of good form. So we will let bygones be bygones, and content ourselves with asking in which of these galleys it is that rich cargo is to be found describable as Christian Virtue.

With regard to the question Peace or War, do the Christian Virtues take root with Bishop Barnes or the Bishop of London, or do they not take root at all, but just flutter about in accordance with the political situation? Is it a Christian Virtue to turn the other cheek when one is smitten or must one look for this elusive attitude to Muscular Christianity in a coloured shirt? Is the question that of Holy Matrimony? Does Christian Virtue here consist of celibacy, and granting matrimony only in those lamentable cases where some concession to the flesh is imperative? Have the Pauline injunctions any place in Christian virtue? Is it the place of the good Christian husband to see that his wife obeys him and *in all subjection*? If two marry because they have found "it is better to marry than to burn," when God has joined them together, be it even as cat and dog, must no man put them asunder? Does Christian virtue lie in the practice of Birth-Control or the Pull Quiver? Considerations of space prevent our continuing this catechism indefinitely, but one might ask a final question with, it is hoped, some relevance. Is it a Christian virtue to put lies over to the public, lies of suggestion, implication, innuendo, etc., and (as this to-day seems the supreme Christian virtue) when a lie is considered to redound to the glory and security of the State, is it to be assumed, *ipso facto*, that it redounds also to the Glory of God?

Mr. Swinnerton himself may very well have a clear idea of what constitutes the Christian Virtues. So say all of them. The point remains that if he assures us that a certain Mr. Robinson is quite a decent fellow, we should not mind spending a few weeks' holiday with Mr. Robinson. We should have no uneasiness. No such comfortable feeling would ensue if he assured us that Mr. Robinson was packed with Christian Virtues. For experience has taught us that Robinson might be narrow-minded, mean-spirited, self-righteous, malicious, boring or arrogant. He might even, without stopping for meals, wish to impress upon us that his God has such qualities that no man can put another God before him without serious personal risk. He may have all these qualities or none of them. But it is man himself who from experience has devised rules of accommodation that life may run a little smoothly, so that when he is told that

Robinson plays the game he knows nearly enough what is meant. God made the Christian Virtues and God alone knows what they are. Religion is full of paradoxes. One is that, whenever it is reported that God has revealed himself to man, instead of more certainty and clarity resulting there is less. The taper of the Gods has always given faint illumination. It has been said that Man loves Darkness rather than Light. If it is so, he errs in good company.

T. H. ELSTON.

Francisco Ferrer

BARCELONA MEMORIAL TO THE FOUNDER OF THE MODERN SCHOOL

On Sunday, January 17, 1937, before the people of Barcelona, was solemnly inaugurated the marble tablet with the effigy of Ferrer and the following inscription:—

Plaza F. Ferrer Guardia

Founder of the Modern School

Shot on October 13, 1909, for the cause of Liberty.

It is with such a simple act that Barcelona has expressed its gratitude to the one who devoted his whole life to the emancipation of the Spanish people.

F. Ferrer was born in 1856 at Alella of well-to-do parents, who saw to it that he received a very catholic education. But at the age of twenty, already he was obliged to leave his father's home on account of his republican ideas. Following a rising at Santa-Colonna de Farnès, he sought refuge at Paris, where he acquired a very profound culture and exercised the profession of teacher.

It was then that he realized his vocation as a teacher and that he conceived the idea of his modern school. Thus, when an inheritance from Mlle. Meunier, an eccentric spinster who had been interested in Ferrer's schemes, enabled him to put his ideas into practice, he went to Spain and founded numerous schools based on rationalistic and libertarian principles. These schools met with a great success. At that time there existed in Spain only professional schools, generally under the direction of Jesuits. The child's mind was stifled in an atmosphere of hypocrisy and prejudice. Ferrer on the contrary wished to create of the child a man capable of reasoning for himself.

Teaching was to remain absolutely neutral. To have trained the child to oppose the Government and the Church at an age when he could not yet understand the issues would have seemed to him an abuse of the child's liberty.

"First of all," he would say, "let us make our children young people who are well instructed. Later, when they shall have become men, we shall strive to inculcate in them the ideals of emancipation which are so dear to us."

Like the really modern educationalist he was, he had understood that a rigorous discipline prevents the child from developing, and leads to introversion. Thus, as Dr. Montessori afterwards prescribed, he insists that the child should have the utmost liberty. He wrote in the *Rénovation de l'Ecole*, "Such progress will be made, in the direction of greater liberty, for I am convinced that constraint is only the excuse of reason and that the educator who is really worthy of the name will obtain all by spontaneity, for he will be aware of the needs and desires of the child, and he will know how to foster his development, merely by satisfying them to the utmost extent."

Thanks to such ideas, Ferrer's work developed wonderfully. Not only children, but adults followed the courses: 120 organizations had been started in the

principal cities, spreading the new ideas broadcast. The Modern School had at its head a board of studies, composed of educators, politicians, writers and scholars.

But the success of his school was attended by uneasiness in the Church and the forces of reaction. Thus the first pretext was seized to make the continuation of his work impossible for Ferrer. Such an opportunity was provided by the attempted assassination by Matteo Morral on the day of Alfonso XIII.'s marriage. As Morral had been employed three years previously as librarian in Ferrer's publishing office, the latter was accused of complicity. In spite of the faked trial for which he stood he was acquitted, but the schools were closed.

Then Ferrer devoted all his energies to his publishing house so as to make known throughout Spain the works of the great masters who had guided his thought, Reclus, Kropotkin and others.

But tragic events were soon to come and put an end to his work. On July 26 and 27, 1909, there were risings in all Catalonia and in Barcelona particularly, to protest against war being waged by Spain against Morocco, the onus of which was heavily borne by the working classes. The general strike became a revolt, there were many dead, innumerable Churches and Convents were destroyed.

The reprisals were terrible, and the occasion was not lost of accusing Ferrer. He was arrested on the capital charge of having caused the revolt. No proof could be found to justify the accusation, so it became necessary to have him tried by military tribunal where no normal judicial procedure was respected. All Europe rose indignant against this outrageous violation of human rights. Thousands of petitions were sent to the Spanish Government, but it had decided that Ferrer must perish, and the Government was regarded with indignation the whole world over.

It was impossible to find proofs against Ferrer, for he had in no way taken part in the rising, not through fear, but because he was not "revolutionary" in the sense of the word then prevailing. He did not believe in the usefulness of armed revolts to secure liberty.

"In order to change humanity's condition," he wrote in a letter, "there is nothing more urgent in my opinion than to establish an educational system such as we understand it, and which, bearing fruit, shall facilitate progress and make the realization of all generous ideals easier. That is why it seems to me that to work at this early date for the abolition of capital punishment, or for a general strike without knowing how we shall bring up our children, means beginning at the end and wasting our time."

As the *Spectator* wrote, one must see in him "a revolutionary such as Tolstoy, a reformer philosopher who wished to overthrow society, not with bombs, but with ideas." In spite of Ferrer's obvious innocence, he was condemned to death and executed in a ditch at Montjuich. He cried out before being shot, "You there, you can do nothing. I am innocent. Long live the School . . ."

His death, having aroused the indignation of all Europe, brought many partisans to his ideas, and so proved as fruitful as his life. To-day the memory of Ferrer animates all revolutionary Spaniards. He wrote before his death, "I desire that my friends shall speak little or not at all concerning me, for one creates idols when one exalts men, and this is a great evil for the future of humanity; actions alone, no matter who is the agent, must be studied, exalted or attacked . . ."

This wish, so full of nobility, has been respected; it is the work of Ferrer which our comrades in Catalonia wish to continue; they wish to maintain in the schools that spirit which he had created. 60,000 children now

receive the education which it would have been the dream of Ferrer to give them. By this immense educational effort, they are showing as Ferrer had pointed out, that to destroy was useless, unless one could create the real constructors of a future society.

ML. B.

(Reprinted with permission from "Spain and the World," Friday, February 19, 1937.)

Nature Notes of a Freethinker

And lastly came cold February, sitting
In an old wagon, for he could not ride,
Drawn of two fishes, for the season fitting,
Which through the flood before did softly slyde
And swim away: yet had he by his side
His plough and harness fit to till the ground,
And tools to prune the trees, before the pride
Of hasting Prime did make them burgein round,
So past the twelve Months forth, and their due places found.

Spenser.

FLOODS and frost, saffron skies in the morning melting into opal in the east, twilights with delicate backgrounds of pale purple to the lean and scanny fingers of the tree branches impotently clawing the air and, on the sixteenth of January, in the afternoon, at five o'clock, Venus was hanging like a diamond pendant below the first quarter of the moon. The high winds, in our time, as in Spenser's, have heaved and sighed and moaned through the huge leafless boughs of oak and elm, hissed through the evergreen leaves of holly and sobbed far away in the valley after leaving in their train broken branches—nature's rough way of pruning. This wind music, now for some unknown reason more delightful to me than an orchestral performance, plays no tricks with the emotions like the artificial kinds. In some remote way it reminds me of time and my own place in eternity. Over the swollen ponds the feet of the wind pass dimpling the grey waters, twitching at tufts it seems, as though the gracefully bent rushes have moved to acknowledge the harbingers of storm. Purifier and strengthener, good health from the west, the wind, as a fact whose effects only can be seen, wings its flight over England maybe to fall in the North Sea or Siberia. As free as the wind? There is gentle irony in this familiar expression. Boreas has a master, although he will not say "by your leave" to uproot a tree of two hundred years' growth, or level a chimney, or take the roof off a chicken house, or dislocate the parachute from a woolley-headed dandelion the master of Boreas has a master too, but does it matter? The pink cheeks of children, through the energising ozone, cancel all curiosity which takes us into the roundabout of *ad infinitum*.

The thrush, who sings his song twice over, as Browning tells us, gives tantalizing advice. Whilst I mend a fence, plant a tree or put the sickle through some of last year's useless growth, he calls, "Give it up! Give it up!" And then, afraid that his advice has been taken, hurriedly he sings "Stick to it! Stick to it!" And the worker concludes that the song simply means a marking out of bird territory on which to bring up his young. At least, I believe that bird-song is not for man, although he cannot but delight in it. Further, man has done nothing to merit music from the feathered spirits of woods and meadows, who have leisure to adorn a spray with their presence, and add grace and beauty to it by a cascade of wonderful notes from a tiny throat. But there is something strange about the liking of birds for proximity to man. I had the free run of the lands on a large farm, and I thought that I should find something wonderful and exciting, but nothing more came to me than a woodpecker's nest in an ash tree about a mile from a main road. I flushed a heron in the marshes, but on the roadside, at intervals noisy with mechanical traffic, or the friendly clatter of horses' hoofs, the robin, blackbird, whitethroat, hedgessparrow and yellow hammer preferred to build their un-mortgaged houses themselves, and do

as they always do, trust to luck. If a house was plundered, raw material was always available for a new one. On Hampstead Heath, I found a wren's nest near to the leg of one of the seats. In some remote past, man and bird may have been friends, but until birds have better reasons for trust, I hope they will remain shy and keep at arm's length and more. Fanciful, yet hoping it were true, I remember four lines by Eden Phillpotts—who has probably forgotten them:—

When Adam and his lady fell
From out their arboreal dell,
The robin said, "I'm coming too,
Because I only sing for you."

And now, having worn blisters on my hands with planting trees to make up for some of those slaughtered by heartless wretches, hewed wood, and carried water, I am going to sit in an easy chair, smoke and let William Cobbett write the following paragraph for me. You will like his style, and, whimsical or not, the idea of this wonderful old man as being a breath of vigorous fresh air in a fusty world appeals to me:—

I will not, with Lord Bacon, praise pursuits like these, because "God Almighty first planted a garden"; nor with Cowley, because "a Garden is like Heaven"; nor with Addison, because "a Garden was the habitation of our first parents before their fall"; all which is rather far-fetched, and puts one in mind of the dispute between the gardeners and the tailors, as to the antiquity of their respective callings; the former contending that the planting of the garden took place before the sewing of the fig-leaves together; and the latter contending that there was no gardening at all till Adam was expelled, and compelled to work; but, that the sewing was a real and *bona fide* act of tailoring. This, to be sure, is vulgar and grovelling work; but who can blame such persons when they have Lord Bacon to furnish them with a precedent! I like, a good deal better than these writers, Sir William Temple, who, while he was a man of the soundest judgment, employed in some of the greatest concerns of his country, so ardently and yet so rationally and unaffectedly praises the pursuits of gardening, in which he delighted from his youth to his old age; and of his taste in which he gave such delightful proofs in those gardens and grounds at Moor Park in Surrey, beneath the turf of one spot of which he caused, by his will, his heart to be buried, and which spot, together with all the rest of the beautiful arrangement, has been torn about and disfigured within the last fifty years by a succession of wine-merchants, spirit-merchants, West Indians, and God knows what besides: I like a great deal better the sentiments of this really wise and excellent man; but I look still further as to effects.

And what those effects are may be found recorded in Cobbett's *English Gardener*.

NICHOLAS MERE.

Acid Drops

The Lord moves in mysterious ways, etc., and many people have been blaming our Government, and our Government has been blaming other Governments, while other Governments have blamed ours for the armament race. Now it turns out that it was all part of the Lord's plan to provide work for the people of Sheffield. For we see that the Vicar of Attercliffe held a special thanksgiving to God for his having provided work for the steelworkers of Sheffield. All the Governments stand acquitted. They were mere pawns in the hands of providence.

Yet it seems a very roundabout way of getting to work even for God Almighty, who has for long severely taxed the powers of his followers to invent excuses for his conduct. He might have revived one of his old tricks and rained food from heaven, or he might have instigated a furore for knives or scissors, or have suddenly dissipated into dust a lot of steel objects, and so created a demand for more. We admit that making big guns is more spectacular than making articles for domestic purposes, and if we are to thank God for getting us out of trouble it is

probably better advertising to stir up serious troubles to commence with. So perhaps the Vicar of Attercliffe knows best, and the armament race is "God's way of benefiting the people of Sheffield."

The Archbishop of Canterbury has been holding a meeting in the House of Commons to plead with members to join in bringing the people back to religion. Leaving Freethought on one side—for we do not think that non-religious members would have the courage to even attempt to call a meeting for the purpose of advancing Freethought—we wonder what would be said if Mohammedans were to use a Committee Room for the purpose of advancing the cause of Islam. But Christian impudence knows no limits, and no member of the House has the courage to call it to account.

At the meeting in question the Archbishop solemnly informed the members present that the Church must meet the nation's needs. That is very helpful. The aim of the campaign is to awaken the nation to the need for religion. So the position is to awaken the nation to religion, then the Church will work to give the nation what it needs. It sounds like a patent medicine firm first of all making the nation need its pills, and then working hard to give the nation the pills it needs. "Arch. Cant.," to follow the American abbreviation, is living up to his title.

The Archbishop also advised that members should make the daily prayers in the House more real and less formal, and should also revive the processional attendance at St. Margaret's Church. Why not advise the use of (unboiled) peas in the boots of members? Parliamentary Government has lost much of its prestige of late years; it looks as though the Archbishop would like to make it completely contemptible.

A Mr. J. G. Miles was responsible for a lecture on St. Peter Claiver, at the Roman Catholic Hall, New Ferry. Mr. Miles complained that people were ignorant of the great good done by Claiver on behalf of the slaves, and dwelt on the way in which he (seventeenth century) went among the slaves in S. America doing good. But Mr. Miles's lecture was incomplete. It is true that he confines his eulogy to the mere visiting of the negroes, and to kindnesses shown to the slaves by St. Claiver, but he says nothing of the fact that the Saint accepted slavery as a proper and natural thing. All he was concerned about was the souls of the slaves, and attending to the sick.

The lecture would have been more complete had Mr. Miles pointed out that the slave trade in South America was the creation of the Christian Church, and that this was instituted when the ancient form of slavery was practically extinguished. Also he might have mentioned that it was under Christian rule that the very worst forms of slavery were developed, and that the Roman Church never saw anything wrong in it. The Catholic Church itself owned large numbers of slaves, and the "saints" were unmoved by the fact. More, it was expressly forbidden to monasteries and other religious organizations to liberate their slaves without special permission from the Church. They were property, and were to be treated as such. Decidedly, this lecture of Mr. Miles was very incomplete. The true relation between the Christian Church, as a whole, and slavery is fully set forth, with authoritative references in Mr. Cohen's *Christianity Slavery and Labour*. We should like to see Mr. Miles attempt an answer to that work.

The discussion as to whether "Green Pastures" is a film that should be shown to the pure-minded religionists of Glasgow is on in that city. And, as was the case in London, the apology that it is *Religion* as the unsophisticated mind of the negro sees it, is being put forward. But that is to miss the whole value of the play. It is Christianity as the overwhelming majority of Christians, educated and uneducated, saw it until Freethought made

them ashamed of the primitive nonsense which "true Christianity" enshrines. It was the conception current in the time of Paine, and for attacking which scores of men and women were sent to prison. It was the religion which the blasphemy laws were created to protect, it was the religious conception that dominated preachers like Spurgeon, and such evangelical mountebanks as Moody and Billy Sunday. It is a cowardly hypocrisy to pretend that it is just the contents of the uneducated mind. It is the stuff of which real Christianity is made.

Consider the use of a single expression. The chief character is "de Lawd." That sounds passable. But it is really God, and that gives the game away. It is the conception the black man has of God, and *it is the conception of God that white Christians taught him* because it was their own. Let people get this truth into their heads, and there is a lesson in the philosophy of religion to be learned from "Green Pastures." As things are it is being used to add to the humbug already current as "true Christianity."

It would be difficult to find a superstition too stupid for someone in authority not to defend. The latest example of this is the case of Professor Paul, of the Institute Catholique, Paris, who has been "investigating" the authenticity of the Holy Shroud—the identical wrapping in which the body of Jesus Christ was swathed. The Professor has written an article for the "Scientific American," in which he argues that the shroud is authentic because the "figure" on the shroud can have been made by Jesus and none other, and therefore denies that the figures are a fourteenth century painting. We congratulate the Professor in his recognition that the impressions must have been made by Jesus, whatever their age may be. He is the one living authority who can just say what Jesus looked like, and what kind of an impression his body must have made. This leaves the holy relic of a bottle of the darkness that overspread Egypt quite in the shade.

The Pope's first public appearance after his illness is likely to be on Easter Sunday. The event will depend on his health, and also on the weather says a Renter message. No dependence on God, it seems.

The *Streatham News* reports a burglary at the house of the Tooting Congregational Minister. The thieves seem to have helped themselves liberally to money, and even to a gold badge presented to the Minister by some admiring churchgoers. But the local newspaper shows that the thieves were of a more discriminating character—they searched amongst the pastor's papers and "ruthlessly discarded all the sermons, which they left scattered on the floor." Can it be that these ruffians had already **HEARD** these sermons preached—how else account for the vindictiveness of their attitude?

A recent issue of the *Modern Churchman* affords a delightful illustration of the glorious principles of the universal brotherhood which inevitably follows Christianity. The editor, Dr. Major, pens the following brightly satirical reference to the "brotherhood" of the bigwigs of churches which have absolute identity of belief in the "essentials" of the religion they both profess:—

It is true that a number of the Free Church Leaders are on friendly terms with the Primate, and even on occasion dine with the bishops at the Athenæum, although precluded from partaking with them at the Lord's table.

"Have we finished with the Cross?" asks Mr. Ernest H. Jeffs, in the *Christian World*. He admits his own "embarrassment and distaste in the presence of the Cross." His distaste seems rather difficult to understand as he says "the life of love cannot but be a perpetual denial and sacrifice of self." "Love," he adds, "must suffer, and love is God." It is a most extraordinary misconception of human love which pretends to see it solely as suffering and to define it as "self-denial,"

and praise it as "sacrifice." If such ideas were expressed outside the pulpit or the sanctimonious sanctum of a religious newspaper, one would naturally regard them as pathological. We sympathize deeply with young people whose education is contaminated with such utterly ridiculous ignorance.

To raise money for a Catholic parochial hall at Dagenham, a bazaar was to be held at the Westminster Cathedral Hall on Wednesday, the 10th inst. "Twenty pretty girls" (quoting the *Star* diarist) were to "sell votes for themselves bearing the questions: 'What girl would you like to be shipwrecked with?' 'Who has the most optimistic face?'" Young women were to vote on the questions: "Which man would you trust in a crisis?" and "Which man do you consider the most attractive?" What posers to set Catholic women! The only permissible reply of the "faithful" is surely "Father What's-his-name."

However, we are far more inclined to be serious than flippant on this matter, having to suggest that sex-appeal in a Catholic environment constitutes *gross cruelty to celibates*. We go further, in view of the frequent appearances of priestly "penitents" in the criminal dock, and say that Catholics have no right to allude to human physical attraction where celibates are of the company. To parade beauty or mere ordinary femininity before priests is an outrage on human feelings. For such feelings will have no other than human response, despite the profoundest theology—or philosophy. Our sympathies go out toward the many priests who have discovered this truth too late.

"To raise money." What a particularly religious ring there is in those opening words in a preceding paragraph! Repeated as often as the recurring "Amen," these words should be incorporated with all forms of church-service and prayer as expressing, better than all other words, the *active principle* of Christianity.

Evolutionary processes are amusingly misunderstood when theologians take on themselves to describe them in a suitably pious garb. The Rev. Russell Maltby, D.D., writes:—

People tell us about evolution. Nowadays they do not talk quite as they used to do in my early days. They do not see a slowly advancing tide of life so that, so to speak, it was always better on Wednesday than it was on Tuesday. What they see is some sensational leaps along the history of the rising tide of life.

But of all those great and wonderful upward leaps ordained by the will of God, I wonder if there was anything so wonderful as when some man went down on his knees and spread out his hands to a God.

Mr. Maltby is not talking about evolution, he is talking about the queer phases of strange survivals. Westminster Abbey sees practically the same sights as our earliest ancestor witnessed. It is the building which is different, not the "act of worship" which continues to take place in 1937 just like it did in B.C. 9370.

All the sophistry of ages of exegesis cannot make clear to the Christian inquirer of to-day, how a benevolent God can wilfully and cruelly bring into the world a child cursed with disease. The Rev. F. E. England, B.D., is asked by a correspondent in the *Christian World* to explain the text of John ix. 3, which states definitely that a child was born blind at the behest of God. In this particular case it is said that Christ "healed" him, but the damning declaration made by Jesus was that "the works of God" were "made manifest," by this abominable devilry. Mr. England does not improve matters by saying that human suffering is

used by God for His own glory. Every place of man's need is a potential occasion for the works of God to be made manifest.

But what should we say of a physician who took away a boy's sight in order to demonstrate his "power" and "glory" by giving it back? The doctor would probably get seven years.

How much longer will the Church try to stave off its well-merited doom? Week by week the happy tale is told of fast-dwindling congregations and endeavours to maintain a 500-seating edifice on the backs of half-a-dozen worshippers. No lamentable tale this! St. Bartholomew's, Poplar Road, Islington, is likely to succumb to—the Cinema, according to the vicar's warden. Only half-a-dozen at morning service and twenty or so, mostly women, at evening service during the last twelve months! But the warden thinks "that with the right man we could still attract good congregations." Well, well!—and Christians have been told all along that Christ was "the right man!" By the way, the "living" was worth £600 a year, with an allowance in lieu of a vicarage. The cost per head of a congregation would ruin even a film company.

The Bishop of Tanganyika has been telling the Australians that "God has given Central Tanganyika to Australia as a sphere of influence in Africa." This is a great compliment to Australia, but we can take it God knows a worthy people when he sees one. "Our work," says the Bishop, "is to save the people. Superstition, appalling and disastrous ignorance, witchcraft, and disease hold terrible sway." The Bishop's house must, in all decency, first be put in order. There are other things beside charity which should begin at home.

The Rev. Father J. Ferrari has been telling the people of Sydney something about divorce. Good laws, he said, could not be altered to relieve particular hardships, especially when it was not a human but a divine law. Even divine laws, we are afraid, in these unregenerate days, must give way to better.

The Bishop of Armidale has been telling the people of Sydney something about Jesus. "Jesus did not trust a community founded on blood or self-interest," we are told. Jesus did not bother about community questions at all.

The Rev. T. E. Ruth, Congregationalist, has been telling the people of Sydney something about Christianity and civilization. "The programme of Christianity," we are told, "was the higher programme of civilization." And if you want to see its monument, look around. Or is it the intention of Christianity never to get beyond the programme stage?

Fifty Years Ago

VOLTAIRE found one good thing to say of the Roman Catholic Church, with all its superstition, tyranny and abominations. It was, he said, "the opera-house of the poor." In England, at least, the Romanists have learnt better. They have made their churches the Sunday concert-house of the rich. The poor cannot get a sniff at the incense under sixpence a head. Large sums are realized by performances of the "Stabat Mater" and masses by renowned masters of music. On these occasions the doors of the Catholic Churches are besieged by crowds as anxious to pay their shilling or half-crown for an entertainment to enliven their dull Sunday as those around the doors of the Lyceum Theatre on a week night. No wonder the Anglican Church is ever approaching the Roman. The secret of the success of the latter lies not in its doctrine, but in the sensuous character of its worship. Devotion is becoming more histrionic. The clergyman studies the arts of the stage. Gestures, genuflections and change of clothes are important items in his business. A play representing scriptural scenes leading up to the birth of Jesus was received with much acceptance on the boards of a Clapham Church, and we may possibly look forward to a revival of the Passion Plays, if only people can be got to play the part of Judas Iscariot.

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THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

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TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. MCCLISTOCK.—Many such statements have been made, but without any conclusive proofs. And generally, even though very many of the so-called "facts" of Spiritualism were admitted they would not prove the survival of personality. There is a world of difference between many "facts" and their explanation.

A. SHIEL.—We have sent on the poem. It is quite obviously not written by Burns, although good enough in its way.

R. PAYNE.—We do not think on reflection, that the illustration is quite as bad as you appear to think. We admit it might have been better and closer, but as an illustration, it appears to serve.

J. M. MOSLEY.—Glad you think the *Freethinker* better than ever. If it is kept as good we shall be satisfied. Anyway we do our best, and might do better if the arrangement of twenty-four hours per day were not so strictly observed. Hope you were successful in your aim.

For Advertising and Distributing the *Freethinker*.—Don Fisher, 4s.

B. HECKFORD (Sydney).—Thanks for cuttings. It is only right that you should have, down under, a fair share of pulpit wisdom. The mother country must not be put upon past bearing.

G. F. LAWS (British Columbia).—*Grey Owl* has been the subject of an appreciation in this paper. Thanks for cutting.

AUSTIN FORBES.—Thanks for appreciative letter, and for what you are doing to circulate the *Age of Reason*. If our friends put their backs into it we ought to exhaust the whole of the very large edition by the autumn, and have another edition out by the end of the year. That would establish a record for both price and distribution, and the profit to the movement is certain to be great. Other profits are non-existent, and are not looked for.

H. MERSON.—It is the only way. It would not do to take the editor of *John O' London's Weekly* too seriously. He is evidently out of his depth when he approaches the realm of philosophy. That is the kindest view to take.

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

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

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Sugar Plums

Mr. Cohen had a good and extremely interested audience at Glasgow on Sunday last, to listen to his address on "Thomas Paine." His sketch of the state of affairs in Europe and America, with Paine's influence on the times in which he lived was evidently greatly appreciated. It is quite clear that there is room for a life of Paine which should be more than a mere sketch of his life. "Intimidated historians," have done their best to bury Paine. It is time that a real resurrection took place, and along with that the resurrection of other eighteenth and early nineteenth century Freethinkers.

The Third Annual Dinner of the Glasgow Branch of the N.S.S. was very successful—a good attendance, good speeches and capital entertainment. Among the former were the President of the Branch, Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Cohen, Mr. Mackay, Mrs. Whitefield, Mrs. Bridges, and Mr. T. L. Smith. Miss Blair and Mr. Gerrard delighted all with their singing, and Mr. Jack Laurie was witty and amusing in his recitations in broad Glaswegian Scotch. On the musical side there was a very good performance by Mrs. Friedeman on the piano, and Mr. Kayzer's playing on the 'cello both made one regret that the evening was not longer. Those responsible deserve the thanks and congratulations of the members.

On Sunday next (March 21) Mr. Cohen will lecture in Manchester at the Picture House, Market Street, Manchester, on "What is the Matter with Religion?" Admission is free, but there are reserved seats at sixpence and one shilling each. This is Mr. Cohen's last public meeting this season—at least he hopes it is. The secretary of the Manchester Branch would be obliged if those who have tickets in hand for Mr. Cohen's meeting will send all unsold tickets, with cash for sold ones, to Mr. H. Collins, Rosamund, Andrew Lane, High Lane, Nr. Stockport.

The two numbers of the *Pamphlets for the People*, *What is the Use of Prayer?* and *Christianity and Woman*, are now ready. The price is one penny each, by post threepence. We beg the help of our readers in their circulation. They are intended for propaganda.

The world is full of curious things and curious people. A correspondent, writing as a member of the N.S.S., expresses surprise at a paragraph in this column concerning the writing desk of Charles Bradlaugh, which has been presented to the N.S.S. He thinks we are indulging in a form of relic-worship. It sounds to us like the wail of a seventeenth century Puritan who has strayed into the wrong camp. There is a decided difference between relic-worship, which involves the belief in a magical property inhering in the object concerned, and an associative memory which rests upon the value we place upon the personality with which the object was originally connected. An article of dress, a chair, a field, a village, a book, a portrait, anything, may have this kind of value to us, and we are the better for realizing it.

The *Sheffield Independent* says of our edition of the *Age of Reason*, "The reprint of this famous work is welcome, and it is honoured by a provocative introduction by Mr. Chapman Cohen." The introduction is provocative only in the sense that it endeavours to pave the way for giving Paine his proper place in English history, and which our cowardly and time-serving historians have, for the greater part, been afraid to allot him. Hitherto no one has had the courage to challenge the estimate made. With a certain class, discretion is always the better part of valour.

Under the auspices of the North London Branch N.S.S., a debate has been arranged for to-night (March 14) "That Christianity is both Justified and Necessary." The affirmative will be taken by Mr. G. W. Farrell; the negative by Mr. L. Ebury. Mr. Farrell is the Secretary of the Lady Margaret Road Literary Society, and an interesting evening is indicated. The debate will be held in the Primrose Restaurant, 64 Heath Street, Hampstead, N.W.3, one minute from Hampstead Underground Station, and will commence at 7.30 prompt.

We are happy to congratulate the Leicester Secular Society on celebrating last Sunday, its 50th anniversary, in the fine Secular Hall, which stands to testify to the courage and intelligence of Leicester Secularists. Mr. George Bedborough, as the speaker, and an excellent programme of music etc., brought a large audience of enthusiasts to the anniversary "service." Mr. Bedborough is lecturing this Sunday (March 14), at the Birmingham Branch of the N.S.S. (Shakespeare Rooms, Edmund Street), at 7 p.m. on "Modernism."

From the *News-Chronicle* we quote a remark of Canon George Buchanan, in the Savoy Chapel, on the Archbishop of Canterbury's *Recall to Religion* :—

The reason why many will not come to church is that we have failed to make God interesting. For the outsider, in these days, everything else in life is intensely interesting except God. The clergy have in a vital sense to "cater for the public." If the problem be difficult for the Church it is well nigh impossible for the parson.

We give Canon Buchanan a mark for his candour. At the same time we think the job of making God interesting is one for God to attend to. We consider it highly derogatory to his reputation to put the job out to advertising contractors and professional boosters.

A correspondent, in the same journal, pointed out that the B.B.C. were quite right in giving a preponderance of time to religion as "England was a Christian country." Mr. Archibald Robertson pointed out in a subsequent issue, that over 30 years ago the *Daily News* took a religious census, and found that only 10 per cent of the people attended any place of worship. He also added that the percentage to-day was probably less.

Our readers should keep on writing to the press. Their motto should be "Try, try, try again." The day comes when they find a short and effective note has appeared. It is good as well, in spite of failures, to remind newspapers that they have Freethinkers amongst those who help to build up their circulation.

The West London Branch of the N.S.S. are having a Dinner and Dance at Union Helvetia, Gerard Place, Shaftesbury Avenue, on Thursday, March 25. The Reception is at 7; Dinner at 7.30 sharp. Tickets are four shillings each, and these can be obtained from the Secretary, Mr. C. Tuson, 11 Portland Road, Holland Park, W.11 and early application is advisable. We are asked to state that vegetarians are being specially catered for.

"But We Must Believe In Something!"

THE "half-baked" condition of the average intellect is one for which its owner cannot always be held responsible. The knowledge we acquire may be of two kinds—correct and incorrect—and the one kind is not readily distinguishable from the other. So unless we have been trained to apply methods of analysis and criticism to the information which is presented to our minds, we are liable to swallow the false with the true without being aware that we are doing so.

A thorough knowledge of the functions and limitations of mathematical symbols is essential to their proper use. Without such knowledge any mathematical calculation is almost certain to contain error. Similarly a thorough knowledge of the functions and limitations of verbal symbols is essential to the proper use of language. Without such knowledge, reasoning, which is a form of calculation with words, is almost certain to be unsound. Unfortunately our educational pundits have not yet woken up to the necessity for training children in the proper use of language. Hence the prevalence of incorrect thinking and reasoning.

Practical experience by itself seldom amounts to much more than the primitive method of learning by trial and error. It certainly teaches the individual to distinguish between those factors in life which are beneficial to him and those which are not. But, as a method of acquiring and increasing knowledge, its scope is limited and its action slow. It is language, in the main, which has enabled us to step beyond this essentially animal procedure. Verbal records of

newly discovered benefits and truths render them more permanent and more easily accessible to a wider public. Verbal instruction enables us to pass on these benefits and truths to future generations, thus saving them the trouble of repeating the experiments and errors of their predecessors.

Yet although language has apparently speeded up the process of acquiring knowledge, it has also brought with it an increased capacity for perpetuating and spreading knowledge which is incorrect. Crude ideas and fallacious forms of thought are embodied in the very instrument which we employ to increase the stock of knowledge already acquired. So it follows that what we gain on the one hand will continue to be largely nullified on the other, unless we are forewarned and forearmed against the inherent drawbacks to reasoning which language contains.

There is, indeed, plenty of evidence that our failure to make a proper study of language in its relation to reasoning has resulted in the prevalence of what I describe as "half-baked" intellects. It would be safe to gamble that less than one per cent of the populace ever troubles to think of this relationship, or of the many possible absurdities of reasoning which their use of words may (and does) lead them into. People write, talk, argue and bandy words about in the fond belief that they are using language correctly and therefore thinking logically. Yet all the while most of them are as vague and as ignorant of their own meanings as a babbling infant.

Proof of this fact is readily to be obtained by anyone who, in the midst of a wordy discussion, chooses to interpolate the simple question: "What exactly do you mean by that?" The effect of this harmless and often necessary question is like an unexpected kick on the shin. Annoyance, impatience or scorn are the usual reactions on the part of the person so questioned. And it becomes increasingly obvious that the temper displayed is due to the shock felt at being suddenly brought face to face with his own ignorance. Having no clear conception of his own meaning, and lacking the ability to analyse and to explain the words he uses, he lapses into the primitive self-defence of anger. Even the utmost tact and patience will not always succeed in persuading him that the question was made sincerely and with the sole aim of trying to understand.

These conditions are manifested most frequently when the subject under discussion happens to be religion. Those of us who realize the baneful influence of religious teaching are sometimes apt to feel over-jubilant at the widespread signs of indifference towards religious matters. But if we probe rather more deeply below the surface than is usually done, we cannot but be staggered at the fearful amount of twisted and illogical thinking which prevails, and which, on analysis, is proved to be a direct heritage of religious instruction. Times without number I have been met with the idiotic remark which heads this article. And times without number I have been forced to ask: "What exactly do you mean by that?" The frequency with which this situation has occurred makes it seem worth while to analyse the remark and its implications in greater detail. Perhaps the analysis may help to clear the minds of those many "indifferentists" who are tempted to use it, and who do not realize that it is nothing more than an open confession of their own "half-baked" thinking.

In most cases the remark was made towards the end of a discussion in which my atheistic views, and my reasons for them, had been made explicit. The emphasis laid on the word "something" obviously implied that I believed in *nothing*! Consequently I would begin by demonstrating the absurdity of this

implication. I would point out that I believed in a great many things. I would enumerate such things as honesty, fair dealing, medicines whose efficacy had been proved, and the friendship of persons whom experience had taught me to trust. But I would add that I was not prepared to believe in things whose truth, existence or value I was unable to verify for myself. This last remark would often elicit some such reply as the following: "But there are more things which you can't verify than things which you can. Surely you don't *disbelieve* all the former?"

At this stage I would propound an attitude which, though obvious to the rational mind, appears to have been a novelty to many of my hearers. "Is there no alternative for you except belief or disbelief?" I would ask. "Has it never occurred to you to adopt the attitude of open-mindedness? For me, belief varies in accordance with the verifiable evidence presented to me. Conclusive evidence of a positive or negative character results in belief or disbelief respectively. But when the evidence is inconclusive, insufficient, or contradictory, I neither believe nor disbelieve. I remain open to conviction while waiting for further evidence. Let me recommend this attitude to you, rather than the prevalent one of swallowing everything you read or hear, and then believing or disbelieving according to the dictates of your established prejudices."

Naturally this line of talk, although it analysed the word "believe" into some semblance of meaning and logical application, did not necessarily scotch the idiotic vagueness of the remark as a whole. The ground would quickly be shifted by some such question as: "But how do you explain *all this*?" accompanied by a waving of arms at the universe in general. To which I would reply: "No one can explain *all this*. You and I explain what can be explained, if we happen to know the explanation. The difference between us lies in this: that when I cannot explain, I admit my ignorance and say I don't know, but am willing to find out; you, on the other hand, not being willing or content to say that much, substitute the word 'God' for your answer. By the use of this single word you succeed in concealing your ignorance from yourself and in humbugging yourself that you have provided an explanation. But apart from this, what has an explanation of *all this* got to do with believing in *something*? What is the *something* which we must believe in?"

The answers to this question were as varied as the individuals to whom it was addressed. There was no consistent agreement at all. One would say: "a superior power"; another would say: "a future life"; a third would say: "a purpose behind everything"; and so on almost *ad infinitum*. The number of different *somethings* which we were expected to believe in was amazing in its variety.

My reply in each case was more or less the same. I pointed out that everyone had his own idea of the *something* which it was necessary to believe in. But, as an independent observer, this very multiplicity was nothing more than an indication of muddle-headed thinking. The lack of agreement as to the value or existence of any of the *somethings*, justified me in doubting the value and existence of all of them. Moreover, since quite a large number of people, including myself, got along very well without believing in any of these things, wherein lay the *necessity* for believing? I agreed that one could not go through life without believing in certain things (such as I had already mentioned), but I insisted upon my original criterion for belief, namely, conclusive evidence of a verifiable nature. Such evidence was notoriously lacking in support of any of the *somethings* named.

If occasion demanded, I would attempt to elicit some

clear description of each particular *something* and, in the process, demonstrate the purely theoretic (and usually illogical) nature of the conception. But I would always try to return to the crux of the argument by asking: "Why did you use the word *must*? What compulsion is there to believe in anything unless the evidence of one's senses is so overwhelming as to be irresistible?"

The answers to this question were usually pathetic. More clearly than any others, they provided damning evidence of the stultifying effect of religion upon honest and straight thinking. They showed that analysis or criticism of evidence was equivalent to doubt; and doubt was equivalent to unbelief. And since, according to religious teaching, unbelief is a sin worthy of eternal damnation, how can we expect open-mindedness to be manifested by those millions of "half-baked" intellects who have not as yet completely rid themselves of the verbal poisons they have inherited from religion?

"Is it not better," I would often ask, "to be open-minded, than to believe, and to insist upon others believing, in things which are quite unproven?"

C. S. FRASER.

Paine and Bourgeois Myths

MARX has a passage in which he discusses the way that bourgeois tradition manages to engulf and distort the lives of the men who rebelled against that very tradition. If Capitalism is to maintain its myths, it is essential that it should succeed in distorting history. Without that distortion the whole basis of its propaganda, the "conditioning" that takes charge of everyone from early years in education, the press, and the million insidious forms of social influence, would fail to grip. The most important thing for history as taught under Capitalism is to disguise the fact that the land was stolen without compensation from the people. That is the basic fact that has to be hidden. For the whole dynamic of Capitalism, its creation of a proletariat at the mercy of private owners of the sources of wealth, resulted from the theft of the land from the people.

But no less important is it that the national history should seem to present an unbroken front, an unbroken testimony to the virtues and inevitability of Capitalism. Minor revolts and such matters can be put down to "temporary bad conditions," "ignorance of a kind now eliminated," "agitation of scoundrels," and so on. But the figures of the great rebels provide a more difficult problem. Unless they are to be studiously blackened with all kinds of lies, they stand out as a protest against the tradition. And if they do that, the tradition has a series of threatening question-marks stuck up against it.

Now, Capitalism and its ideologists have no objection to the dirtiest of lies, to any form of blackguarding. The proof of that is the simple fact that they have always met the rebels with this form of retort. But it is not a wholly satisfactory method, however much it is instinctively resorted to in the first moments of panic. It sets up a perpetual problem, for there is always the danger that if there are so many reprobated figures littering the supposedly-harmonious stage of national progress, scepticism may be induced. Also, there is thus no cessation of the fight. The rebel-figures remain as material of defiance for the new rebels that come along, and it is likely that another tradition would arise to split the false concept of national unity.

It is much safer, after the rebel is dead and the first

panic is dissipated, to make a myth out of him. To do this it is necessary to distort again, but in a different direction. For instance, stress is laid on the least integral elements of a man's thought, or it is gently but persistently insinuated that he was well-intentioned but unpractical, a dreamer, and so on. The weaker side is belauded and so much brought to the fore that it tends to overshadow all the rest of the man, all that was most vital and profound in him.

The classic example of this process is Shelley. Everything that was concrete and direct and passionate in Shelley has been hidden away. All that was abstract and futile has been so much emphasized, that for one person who realizes the real content of his work, ten thousand find him an "ineffectual angel."

It is diabolically clever, this method. For, of course, there was a large streak of ineffectuality in Shelley, which provides material for much interesting historical and psychological analysis. But there was also a genuine element of practicality and concrete vision. At all costs the author of such poems as the address to the Men of England had to be turned into a schoolgirl's favourite.

A notable example of what can be done in the way of distortion is to be found in the case of William Morris. Since he was so dangerously clear-sighted in his views on society, and in the advice he gave to the working-class, it was necessary to make him out a vague medievalist dreaming of handicrafts. Of course, here again, there was a streak of truth. But this streak is so enlarged that it completely covers up a much more important truth in the man. Morris was the greatest English social thinker of his century. In his later years he took an important part in Socialist organization, and there is no man to whom the epithet of vague less applies. He prophesied the advent of Fascism as an inevitable condition of the break-up of Imperialism. That fact alone is enough to knock on the head the idea of the medieval dreamer. He ceaselessly warned the workers that they must build up their revolutionary defence if they hoped to maintain social progress, that they must be always ready to meet violence with violence or there was no hope for the world.

He hailed in the Paris Commune the "foundation stone of the new world that is to be." (In this he companioned Marx.) He denounced Imperialism root and branch, and was perfectly aware of the consequences of England's parasitic leeching of the East. He knew from his perception of history and his knowledge of the middle-class from which he came, that the upper and middle-classes were capable of every possible vileness and bestiality in defence of "order" (that is, profits); and again and again he pointed out that a class which was capable of such infinite Imperialist cruelty would not hesitate for a moment in unleashing every form of oppression and torture when once their stability was threatened by the inevitable decline of markets as Imperialism developed.

How many people have read these writings of his, or are even aware that they exist? Every facility is given to those who wish to read his early medievalist verses (some of which are splendid of their kind), and all the biographies emphasize the craftsman in him, and deprecate the "unpractical" "idealism" of his later years when he became a complete and clear-eyed Materialist.

The climax was reached when Mr. Stanley Baldwin gave a speech on Morris's centenary. This was the official culmination of the myth. Nothing of the vital Morris was left. Instead a wraith was admitted into the "English tradition"—a fantastic creature whom Mr. Baldwin welcomed as a true Englishman, apparently because he liked eating raw onions. For, you see, the eating of raw onions is the "real man." The cause for which Morris laboured so selflessly, so

untiringly, the cause for which he would have been ready to die, that, of course, was only a side-line, just a little bit of artistic fatuity which one can forgive the "real man" who is a brother of Mr. Baldwin. That Morris denounced everything for which Mr. Baldwin stands as unfathomably base and evil, that he considered the whole of Capitalism, and in particular British Imperialism, to be something so utterly horrible that no man could even touch it without being defiled, that is of no significance.

Yet it would doubtless be incorrect to accuse Mr. Baldwin of conscious hypocrisy in this matter. It is easy to exaggerate the literacy of our ruling class, and Mr. Baldwin no doubt quite believed in the myth which he was sealing.

It may be mentioned that after R. Page Arnot wrote a pamphlet which vigorously exposed the way that Morris had been edited—everything outspoken being omitted as "ephemeral"—an edition of his Socialist writings has been produced at an extremely high price, mixed up with other writings.

These remarks are a preface to what I wish to say about Thomas Paine. He is one of the very few figures who have never been successfully deodorised and brought into the "tradition." The way that his life and work had resisted this normal distortion is an outstanding tribute to the pellucid integrity of them both. But with such examples as Shelley and Blake before us, we know that the rendering-harmless of revolutionary types is an art in which the reactionaries excel. (For instance, the French extreme right have now praised the Paris Communards for "patriotism.")

JACK LINDSAY.

(To be concluded)

Masterpieces of Freethought

FORCE AND MATTER

By LUDWIG BUCHNER

III.

NOTHING seems more difficult than putting down clearly and unequivocally exactly what is meant by such words as "matter" "force," "mind," and "soul." The slightest slip made by an uncompromising Materialist on these questions is seized upon by the Idealist or the Christian, and made, if possible, to look the veriest nonsense. As I have already indicated, Buchner over and over again showed his dislike for the word "Materialism," not because it did not fairly represent his views, but because his opponents insisted on giving it meanings which not even a "crude" Materialist would agree to. In the book of essays translated under the title of *Last Words on Materialism*, Buchner says:—

The equivocal term "Materialism" is an entirely incorrect, because much too narrow, title for the system of natural and moral philosophy, which has been erected on the enormous progress of science in the last century and the great principle of evolution, and to the foundation of which my *Force and Matter* gave the first impulse. No one who is acquainted with the later editions of that work, or with my subsequent writings on the subject would confuse this philosophy with the system that generally goes by the name of "Materialism." The extreme vagueness of the term is sufficient of itself to prevent this. . . . My impression of each of the authors [of anti-Materialistic books] is that he has a different idea of his much-dreaded antagonist. . . . On this creature of his fancy he forthwith expands his utmost energy. . . . Then he affirms he has done to death the wicked Materialist over and over again!

but by some subtle process of resurrection the Materialist seems to be ever demanding his attention afresh.

Something like this passage will be found very often in Buchner's books and essays; but his protests were mostly in vain. Here was a man who insisted upon the all-importance of "matter" (even though it was with "force"). But his opponents insisted that matter is "dead" or "inert." How does he propose to prove that "matter" also gave "life"? Where does the "soul" of man come from, and how?

Buchner deals at great length with the well-known physiological facts about the brain, its size and capacity; and he insists that "for the purpose of this enquiry it is really quite immaterial . . . how mental phenomena arise from material combinations or from the activities of the brain. It is quite sufficient to have proved by facts the necessary and indissoluble and normal connexion between the brain and mind." But this was not sufficient for the "vitalists." They pressed their attack with great pertinacity on Buchner. One of them, Dr. A. Wagner, called him "anti-quated, crude and unscientific," and he followed this up by maintaining that Buchner's system was "one-sided, poor, superficial, uncritical speculation, naïve realism"—and many other similar epithets; to which Buchner scathingly replied that such a system would seem scarcely worth meeting or refuting. But the vitalists and the idealists never ceased their attack, and it is being pressed to this day.

In that magnificent chapter on Bradlaugh's philosophy which John M. Robertson contributed to the *Life* by Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, will be found a very keen discussion of the battle. Robertson sums it up by quoting Tyndall—who also repudiated the word "Materialism"—"Matter I define as that mysterious thing by which all that is, is accomplished." Says Robertson, "Well, that is 'Modern Materialism,' or it is nothing; the Materialism of Buchner and of Bradlaugh."

Both of them, indeed, protested to their dying day against the absurdity of calling "matter" dead or inert, a hard, immovable lump of "something," and their opponents almost to a man fastened this meaning upon them, ignoring their protests or the definitions given by both of such "things" as "mind" or "soul."

"The word 'mind,' " says Buchner, "is nothing more than a collective word, and a comprehensive expression for the whole of the activities of the brain and its several parts or organs, just as the word respiration or breathing is a collective word for the activity of the breathing organs, or the word digestion is a collective word for the activity of the digesting organ. No doubt, in the case of the brain, that highest and fairest blossom of all terrestrial organization, something more is meant than in the case of the organs of breathing or digestion; we are dealing with the highest achievement of material combinations, we might say with the intellectualization of matter, and with the life and destiny of all that is great and noble among man's achievements on earth."

Buchner quotes Moleschott, "Thought is a motion of matter," at the head of the chapter dealing with the important question of "thought." He says, "that thinking is and must be a mode of motion is not merely a postulate of logic, but a proposition which has of late been demonstrated experimentally." And after giving some account of these experiments, he adds, "All this goes to show that psychical activity is nothing more than a motion going on between cells caused by an external impression. For there is no such thing as thought whose subject does not bear on the senses. All intellectual activity proceeds in final re-

sort from sensation and from the reaction and response of him who experiences the sensations towards the outer world." And further, Buchner insists that "the words *mind, spirit, thought, sensibility, volition, life*, designate no things real, but only properties, capacities, actions of the living substance, or results of entities, which are based upon the material form of existence."

Such plain speaking was seen to be by religious opponents a direct attack on "creation" by "Almighty God." God was completely left out of the question, and this was most bitterly resented by Christians. Buchner had to pay dearly all his life for his frontal attacks on all they believed so firmly, but he never departed from his position. "There is a vast difference," he declared in his essay *What is Matter?* "between the object which we commonly call 'matter,' and the phenomena it is capable of producing. We cannot, therefore, say that life, consciousness, mind, etc., are matter or even material motion; we can only say they are phenomena which are virtually or potentially contained in matter, and make their appearance when the matter reaches a certain stage of complexity and corresponding activity; and this can only be the result of a prolonged and very intricate evolutionary process."

Naturally there is a chapter on "The Idea of God." Buchner at once repudiated the idea that there was in every person, an innate conception of "a supreme personal being who has created the world, and who rules and maintains it." He gives a full historical account of many tribes and peoples who have no idea whatever of such a conception; and he even quotes the England of his day, as having "a million persons who are unbaptized, and who belong to no church," some of them even being ignorant of the name of Jesus Christ. Buchner rejects all gods and all conceptions of such "beings." The Pantheistic God and the personal God of the Theist are for him empty and absurd conceptions.

And regarding "personal continuance the simplest experience and observation," he says, "teaches us that psychical activity ceases with the destruction of its material substratum, or—that *man dies*." And he quotes with approval the inscription which Chaumette, during the French Revolution, placed over the dead in cemeteries: "Death is an eternal sleep."

"Re-incarnation," he likewise attacked, and such words as "spiritual matter," and "soul-substance." He saw nothing terrible in "annihilation"—"we need not grieve because we shall not be in existence when events of the future stir up the world and mankind." He denied the assertion that "the idea of immortality, like the idea of God, is innate in the innermost intellectual being of man." His chapter on this question is, in my opinion, very beautifully written; and it is a pity that so few people now-a-days seem to have read *Force and Matter*, which is packed with similar writing.

From what I have said I hope it will be seen that Buchner's famous work fully deserved its great popularity among the advanced thinkers of his day. It may be that new conceptions of matter have made some of his own statements obsolete or antiquated. Modern science and physics have made such enormous strides since the War, that it is difficult for the average man to keep pace with everything that is now said on the question. I need hardly say that for those interested, *Materialism Re-stated*, by Chapman Cohen, should be read in conjunction with or after reading Buchner. On his own subject no writer during the nineteenth century had such a powerful influence in propagating the non-supernatural theory of the Universe. "Those who still cling to the theory of a vital force are fighting a hopeless battle," cried Buchner. A "vital

force" is still being desperately clung to—even by some who call themselves "Rationalists." And till they recognize the truth of Buchner's saying, *Force and Matter* must still be, itself, a "vital force" in Freethought.

H. CUTNER.

Correspondence

THE AGE OF REASON

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—I have read the *Age of Reason*, and I think that everyone should read it. I find that most people I talk to have never heard of it. I do not see it on sale locally. How can I get the book advertised and read? I have purchased six copies through a friend of mine, and have given four of them away, and am waiting to place the others. May I suggest that each reader of the *Freethinker* should buy at least two copies, more if possible, and send them off to someone who, they think, will be interested, with a covering note to the effect that after having read the book, would they feel inclined to help in the good work by buying two or more copies and despatching them similarly, something after the style of the Chain Letter. Would this help?

Most of us cannot afford to give away as many copies as we should like. The same applies to the *Freethinker*.

L. GODWIN.

[We can supply the *Age of Reason* on favourable terms to all newsagents, and if they will write to our Business Manager these can be arranged.—ED.]

NATURE NOTES

SIR,—My thanks to Mr. Edward Payne for his corrections; as a matter of fact this particular Yew tree was seen near to Juniper Hill, and Juniper Hall making an enchanting picture in time and space. I am old enough to know better having spent much time in the past in verifying references, but I am always grateful for anything which makes for careful writing.

NICHOLAS MERE.

Obituary

HENRY THOMAS HARVEY

ON Thursday, March 4, the remains of Henry Thomas Harvey, who died in his 91st year, was interred in Wandsworth Cemetery. As a boy he sang in the church choir, and was brought up in a strict puritanical atmosphere which was directly responsible for a particularly pathetic incident, the memory of which never left him. Very keen on music he saved his pocket money and bought a violin. The father approved until he learned his son's intention was to become a professional player. The Christian parent then took the violin, broke it across his knees, and threw it into the fire. As a young man he began to read Freethought literature, and for the last fifty years of his life he was a convinced Atheist, reading the *Freethinker* regularly until his infirmity made it no longer possible, only a few days before his death he expressed his contempt for all religious beliefs. In accordance with his wish a Secular Service was conducted at the graveside before a number of relatives and friends by Mr. R. H. Rosetti.

A man who should labour for the happiness of mankind lest he should be tormented eternally in hell, would, with reference to that motive, possess as little claim to the epithet of virtuous, as he who should torture, imprison, and burn them alive, a more usual and natural consequence of such principles, for the sake of the enjoyments of heaven.—*Shelley*.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

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 Kiosk. Should be ordered in advance to avoid disappointment. *Freethinker* and *Spain and the Church* on sale outside the Park gates

INDOOR.

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES BRANCH (17 Grange Road, Kingston-on-Thames): 8.0, each Thursday evening, lectures, discussions, etc.

BETHNAL GREEN AND HACKNEY BRANCH N.S.S. (Bethnal Green Public Library, Cambridge Road, E.2): 8.0, Thursday, March 18, Mr. L. Ebury—"The Belief in God; Man's Folly and His Curse."

MODERN CULTURE INSTITUTE (Caxton Hall): 8.0, Friday, March 19, Dr. Har Dayal on "Methods of Meditation." Free.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Primrose Restaurant, 64 Heath Street, Hampstead, N.W.3, one minute from Hampstead Underground Station): 7.30, Debate—"That Christianity is Both Justified and Necessary." *Affir.*: Mr. G. W. Farrell. *Neg.*: Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.): 7.30, Ronald Kidd, Sec., National Council for Civil Liberties—"The Government, the Citizen and the Police."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Alexandria Hotel, South Side, Clapham Common, S.W.4, opposite Clapham Common Station, Underground): 7.30, Debate—"Is the Belief in God Reasonable?" *Affir.*: Rev. A. F. Taylor Davies, M.A., H.C.F. *Neg.*: Mr. T. F. Palmer.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, W. B. Curry, M.A., B.Sc.—"The Peace Pledge."

LONDON

INDOOR

BEDLINGTON (Reay Memorial Hall): 7.15, Wednesday, March 17, Mr. J. T. Brighton—"Spiritualism."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Shakespeare Rooms, Edmund Street): 7.0, Mr. G. Bedborough (London)—"Modernism or God Up-to-date."

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Laycock's Cafe, entrance via passage facing Burtons): 7.15, Mr. Elias.

BURNLEY (St. James Hall): 11.0, Mr. J. Clayton—A Lecture.

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"Religion and the Local Press."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, Debate—"Is Belief in God Tenable?" *Affir.*: Mr. Grant. *Neg.*: Mr. A. Copland, G.S.S.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. Joseph McCabe—"Can Science Change Human Nature?"

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Transport Hall, entrance in Christian Street, Islington, Liverpool): 7.0, A Lecture.

STOCKTON-ON-TEES (Jubilee Hall): 7.0, Mr. J. T. Brighton—A Lecture.

A

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