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

Views and Opinions

History in the Making

MR. HENRY FORD is a very successful motor manufacturer, and whatever credit is given him in that direction he deserves. He is also prone to now and then offering the world advice on matters which have nothing to do with making motors, and then one is apt to murmur the old adage concerning the cobbler and his last. Difficult as it is for some to realize, there is not in this world of ours any necessary connexion between first-class intelligence and money-making; and that Mr. Ford has made a lot of money and has built fleets of motors, appears to be his only claim to world notoriety. He might have made the finest motor in existence, and with that might also have had the finest intelligence in the world. But providing his motor-making had been kept to a small scale, bringing in but a scurvy income of a few thousands a year, the world would have heard little about him. But he employs many thousands of men, he has a huge income, and the latter fact places him among what the author of "1066 and All That" would call "good things." The insolence of wealth has reached its apotheosis under Christian auspices.

The other day Mr. Ford offered the rising generation two pieces of advice. He advised young men not to read "history," because that was "bunk." He also advised them to read newspapers because that was "real history." I expect that some of my Communist friends will see in this advice an exhibition of the stealthy rascality and subtle plotting of Capitalism, but I do not agree with this at all. I have not the high opinion of the intelligence of the Capitalist world that some people have. The "people" are too cheaply bought—and sold, the successes of "capitalism" are too easily achieved, its blunders are too obvious for one to credit it with the possession of so commanding an intelligence. Mr. G. B. Shaw once said that a boxer with a genuine intelligence would always beat the man who went into the ring with only strength and skill. But, he added, men with first-rate intelligence will not

take up with the game. I think the same thing applies to the kings of capital. They are mostly where they are because there are better things in the world than that of building up huge incomes. The man who can organize a huge business, who is quick to seize on the opportunity for new markets, or who can cleverly exploit a new invention, has his place in life, but one should not take that as including all possible places, or place it among the higher ones.

* * *

History as Written

Now I can agree with Mr. Ford's statement that history, as written, is mainly bunk. This was said long ago by a very much wiser man than Mr. Ford, by Voltaire, who said that history was nothing more than a pack of lies we tell about the dead. It was also said by another very great man, Henry Fielding. An historian said to Fielding, "You are a writer of fiction." "No," replied Fielding, "It is you who write fiction. The only fiction we novelists have in our writings are the names and dates, and they are the only facts you have in your books." The history taught in our schools is generally correct as to names and dates, but for the rest—! Its aim is to establish desired opinions, not to create an understanding of historical processes. National history is written from a point of view that suits the prejudices and local interests of each nation. The truth about Kings and Queens is never told, save by unfashionable writers whose works are said to "lack authority"; and even their works, by an inevitable reaction, are apt to run to an extreme that the suppression and distortion on the other side invite. It is difficult to reach truth in a partisan atmosphere. No one ought to forget the manner in which the history of this country has concealed from the general public the work of such men as Paine, and Robert Owen, and Carlyle, and scores of others. And no one can take seriously the accounts that are given in our educational establishments of, say, Victoria, and succeeding monarchs. Those with intelligence can see how a fantastic character for each is created and perpetuated. The official history of the last war is all right with regard to dates and names. But for the rest—shades of Fielding! The French and German accounts are there also as interesting adventures in the same field of qualified fiction. To write them otherwise would be "unpatriotic."

* * *

Newspaper "Bunk"

If we take the word "history" as implying the kind of thing that is mainly taught in our schools, then I can agree with Mr. Ford that newspapers contain "real history." They contain the "bunk," in a "catchy" form, of which official history in all countries is made. From this point of view newspapers contain "real history," because they publish the same kind of information that meets us afterwards

in official or standard narratives. They ignore the same things, they enlarge the same topics, they tell the same lies, half-lies and qualified truths. The newspapers contain a history of bunk, because they constitute the bunk of which "history" is made. There is, in fact, a very fine example of this in the newspaper press issues of the same day on which Mr. Ford gave his statement. It will be remembered that in the recent case of the vessel that left America with arms for the Spanish Government, and which was taken in the Bay of Biscay by the rebels, only one man escaped, by swimming. He was picked up by a French boat and "revealed" (to use a favourite newspaper word that suggests great power in discovering the obvious) that the unarmed crew had been hunted over the vessel and shot one after the other. The truth of this story is evidenced by the fact that bodies have been picked up at sea with revolver shots in the head.

The *News-Chronicle*, published the man's story, including the deliberate murder of the unarmed seamen. The *Daily Express*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and other papers, published the man's story of how he escaped, but omitted mention of the killing of the seamen. By this omission, one of the vilest crimes that can be committed at sea is there on record as the mere capture of a vessel running arms to one of the two belligerents. It is the kind of a lie in which British papers and British historians excel. When I was in Glasgow I learned that the Glasgow Corporation had refused to decorate the city for the coronation. The council will give poor children and old people a treat, but it will not decorate. I did not see any news of this in London papers, although there were continuous items of how gladly towns were preparing decorations. During the Jubilee procession of George V., there was a daring banner flung across Fleet Street announcing George the Fifth's "reign of War." The incident was unmentioned in nearly all the papers. In other places incidents of a similar nature occurred, but were not recorded in the press. The picture of uniform rejoicing had to be built up. In quite recent months we had a repetition of the same thing in the case of King Edward VIII. Universally written up as an ideal King, the idol of the people, and with his personal character certificated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, based on a knowledge of him from boyhood, he becomes almost in a day the common subject of winks and suggestive jokes, and is forced to abdicate on the ground that the life he has led, and the woman he wishes to marry, make his abdication necessary. Anyone who *studies* the newspapers, and does not merely read them, will find hundreds of illustrations to the same end.

Certainly if one would study the history of "bunk" and the "bunk" of history, one must study the papers—all papers from "left" to "right." With each the aim is to stamp certain views of events on the minds of readers; with each the aim is the product of that kind of "mass mentality," which consists in an uncritical acceptance of set views with as great a docility as is exhibited by a devotee of the Roman Catholic Church. What we have before us is, in fact, the method of the Roman Church, rather less skillfully applied, and in the name of freedom and justice instead of in the names of God and the saints.

* * *

History and the Press

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—," and so I agree with Mr. Ford (who will probably be surprised to learn that he has the support of such men as Fielding and Voltaire), that history is (mainly) "bunk." But to commend the newspapers as offering "real," that is, reliable history, will not do. Newspapers are a reflection of certain types of mind and

character; they are indicative of what certain parties, or churches, or persons wish the public to believe, but that is all. As a whole they are scarcely more reliable than are the advertisements of a quack medicine vendor. They are not to-day even an index of the state of public opinion. They might have been taken as such sixty or seventy years ago. For then newspapers were individually owned, they existed mainly to advance certain opinions, and might be taken as representing the opinions of those who owned or directed them, and those who subscribed to them. Nor were they then under the influence of the large advertisers. To-day no one can say with certainty that the papers represent any opinion whatever—not even of those who own them. Chains of newspapers are common, and in different places advocate different views. Under the same ownership will be found a conservative paper in London, a radical paper in the North of England, and an independent paper in Scotland. The owner will be found advocating one thing here to-day, another and an opposite thing there to-morrow, and often this is for no other reason than to run a distinctive "stunt." And above the owner stands the big advertisers. It is perhaps too much to expect newspaper readers to remember the Government economy stunt of a few years ago, when the London press, following the Government lead, was begging readers to practise the most rigid economy in their expenditure. That was brought to an abrupt stop by the big advertising firms presenting an ultimatum, that if the people were to be urged not to spend advertisements would be stopped. In twenty-four hours the papers discovered that people ought to spend, since circulation of money meant prosperity all round. And the readers themselves take no note of this instability of advocacy because the vast majority have no very definite opinions of their own. They can be made to believe they are vitally interested in the antics of a royal baby, the new hat of the Duchess of Kent, the shopping of the Queen-mother, the outcome of a cricket match in Australia, the escapades of a film star or anything else that is put before them, and so long as it is kept before them.

I agree, then, that one must read the newspapers to get an insight into history. But one must read them as an alienist stores up a record of delusions and phobias in order to diagnose the cases with which he has to deal. And, unfortunately, much of our official history is only the history of the newspaper more authoritatively presented. It is the past as the interested present would have us understand it, or it is the present as established powers would have those living believe it to be. To Mr. Ford history is "bunk," but one suspects that this is because he has a suspicion that it is a bunk, which once understood may serve to rectify the bunk of the newspaper world. Perhaps history may even detect that there is much bunk about Mr. Ford and his kind, and when it does that, the bunk of the newspaper world will have less influence than it has to-day. At present I do not see any vital difference between the bunk of history and that of the newspaper. The latter shows bunk in the making, the former shows us too much of bunk established and regularized. Both should be read, not avoided, for the cure must come from neither the orthodox historian nor the sensation hunting newspaper, nor from those who are interested in creating a "mechanized" opinion, but from the creation of a public that is above all three.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The most formidable weapon against error is reason. I have never used any other, and I trust I never shall.

Paine.

Business and Belief

"Thy blood the priests make poison of,
And in gold shekels coin thy love."
Swinburne, "Lines Before a Crucifix."

APART altogether from the very questionable big business methods of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who control the finances of the State-supported Church of England, there are certain aspects of commercialism which are common to Anglicans and Nonconformists alike. Religion is not only a business, but its promoters have, latterly, in their intense desire to get still more cash, actually done real mischief to ordinary business-men and trade generally.

The striking advertisements of such religious bodies as the Young Men's Christian Association and the Church and Salvation Armies, besides the innumerable appeals of other sectarian bodies for our cash for secular purposes, remind us that the Christian Religion is being developed along more commercial lines than formerly. Preachers and Revivalists now adopt precisely similar methods to theatre-managers, circus proprietors, patent-medicine advertisers, and cinema owners, presumably with the same pleasing financial results. The accentuation of this business side of religion, however, is seen clearest in the commercial methods now adopted in order to raise additional revenue for a superstition alleged to be "without money and without price."

The extent to which ordinary commercial means have displaced voluntary contributions so long in vogue in connexion with complacent congregations is highly significant. The old-fashioned method of collecting shillings and threepenny bits during the services is no longer considered adequate. Even the amateur sale-of-work has long been superseded by more up-to-date and efficient substitutes. So much has this become the case that trading by religious bodies is now considered by business men as a real menace to the welfare of the trading community, and as accentuating the bitter competition of the present day. Bazaars, conducted on strictly business lines, are held for the reduction of church and chapel debts, and the erection of costly and showy places of worship. Missionary, and other propagandist societies, owe a considerable amount of their large incomes to sales of goods, and many thousands of pounds are raised annually in this manner for religious interests.

At a bazaar held at Lincoln over £1,000 was realized, and a week's missionary exhibition at a seaside town brought £250 clear profit. A sale of work in South London produced £300, and a dozen similar functions realized over £2,000.

Just imagine the many similar exhibitions and sales held annually throughout the country for the various and numerous religious organizations, Bible and Missionary Societies. Add to these thirteen thousand parish churches, and ten thousand chapels, mission halls, and tin tabernacles, all of which look to bazaars, exhibitions, sales, and dramatic performances, as an easy way of raising money, and we begin to realize the extent of the practice. Where is all this to end? The logical outcome is seen in the vast multiple-shop business of the Salvation Army, which sells regularly among its members tea, articles of clothing, children's toys, musical instruments, magazines and books, and all manner of requisites, and uses the profits for its propaganda. This Salvation Army has an emigration department, and gets commissions from the railway and steamship companies. Insurance business is also encouraged, thus justifying the pleasantry that Salvationists are insured against fire in this world and in the never-never land.

Then turn to the alluring advertisements of the Young Men's Christian Association, in which a tourist agency figures so prominently. It is money, money all the way! Indeed, the multiplication of get-rich-quick methods in connexion with religion has done more than alarm the commercial world. It is leading slowly and surely to the undoing of the priests themselves. They may make more money, temporarily, but, in their intense greed to increase their receipts, they have, as other tradesmen do, to make themselves pleasant to their customers. Hence they have to make religion a pleasant, as well as a profitable, pastime. To attract paying audiences, painful Sabbaths have been replaced by Pleasant Sunday Afternoons. String-bands and soloists figure in the programmes with oily-tongued preachers. Members of Parliament, and actors, share the pulpit, or platform, with reformed burglars and converted policemen. The rafters echo fervent and hypocritical outbursts on human brotherhood, and "Hell" is left for the innocents who attend Romish churches, Salvationist barracks, and temples of the intellectually lost.

All this would have shocked the sober Christians of the Ages of Faith, when the work of the various Churches was conducted with seriousness, and without the adventitious aid of secular attractions. Faith, we must suppose, was strongest in those days of old, not needing the additional impetus of purely secular amusement. Our believing ancestors went to a place of worship, and their families went with them. They contributed according to their means. It was a painful duty, but it had to be done, like the paying of income tax. Fear of Hell was the lever that operated, but to-day the priestly clutch is loosening. Sooner, rather than later, congregations will tire of the priests' showmanship, and remember that there is a cinema across the road with greater entertainment appeal, and that it costs no more than the "gospel shop."

All this constant appeal for money would not succeed, but for the unpalatable truth that the majority of our population is not half-educated, despite nearly twenty centuries of Christian teaching and priestly domination. It is as plain as a pikestaff that to be a Christian one need not be educated, nor intelligent. To be a Freethinker one must learn and think. The strength of all forms of Priestcraft lies in the unthinking and uninformed masses. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the Christian is a man who does not understand his own religion, who does not know what he himself believes or disbelieves, and has never given a solitary hour's study or thought to his own or any other faith. The Christian religion batters upon ignorance. Its greatest strength is the very tail-end of civilization, and it represents the lowest culture in modern society. A camel's hair tent set in the desert was the progenitor of the Christian Church. Men fashion their gods according to their intelligence. At that time the conception was very primitive and immature. It was said that the Hebrew god met Moses, tried to kill him, and let him go. The record is that of a personal struggle. This figure, originally the god of a nomad people, became, in due time, the three-headed deity of all Christendom. When people learn the true import of all this, it will take far more than priestly showmanship and bazaars to perpetuate such legendary ignorance in the twentieth century. For, in the last analysis, religion is simple and unadorned barbarism, and best left in the twilight of history.

MIMNERMUS.

Accustom a people to believe that priests, or any other class of men, can forgive sins, and you will have sins in abundance.—*Paine*.

The Passing of the Man of Sorrows

WITH only a tiny fraction of the population clamouring each Sunday for the Means of Grace, a Recall to Religion was inevitable. What is occurring in the higher ecclesiastical circles is on all fours with the procedure of the Board of Directors on any commercial undertaking when sales are falling off and dividends drooping. The Old Firm must be resuscitated somehow. Committees are appointed to enquire into causes. Is an advertising campaign indicated? Do Woollens, Ltd., need new methods and new men? The necessity to exist is to them axiomatic, but Cottons, Ltd., view their perturbation with entirely different emotions.

It is demanded that all the cards be placed on the table and face upward. Getting down to brass tacks is felt to be essential. Even *plain language* is called for. One can judge of the gravity of the disease by the suggested remedy.

Canon Buchanan, in the Savoy Chapel, is one of those impelled to the use of plain language:—

The reason why many will not come to church is that we have failed to make God interesting.

This is a bull's-eye. We have no fault to find with the Canon's sagacity. All we feel justified in pointing out is that it is taken for granted that God is interesting, for we feel sure that Canon Buchanan would not force a dubious card upon his congregations. We are confident, for instance, that if God were a jealous God, or had any unlovely characteristic, the Canon would be the first to proclaim: Truth though the Heavens fall!

We shall not be blamed for following such an admirable lead with equally plain language. What we wish to know is whether the problem is what it appears to be: Can we get people to attend Church, any old way? If it should be necessary in order to achieve this purpose, must the visage of the Ancient of Days be made to appear like unto that of Clive Brook, even if this entail face-lifting and other unpleasantnesses? The process is known to the discreet as Progressive Revelation. Holy Mother Church has another process. She has the same difficulties but she keeps up the pretence that God is unchangeable. But then a Holy Church decree is always expressed in *words* and a pontifical utterance in the course of time has to be re-interpreted by another pontiff, and, where the medium of interpretation is words, adaptation to the insistent thought of the day is not difficult to manage.

So God, it is agreed, has to be made interesting in the attempt to attract a developing, but religiously unresponsive, generation. To that end, revelation, tradition, theological consistency and honesty must all go into the melting-pot. Even then it is no easy job making Deity delectable. In order to succeed you must, in the first place,

consider each person's auricular:
What is all right for B would quite scandalize C
(For C is so very particular);
And D may be dull, and E's very thick skull
Is as empty of brains as a ladle,
While F is F sharp, and will cry with a carp
That he's known your best joke from his cradle!

This is admittedly a difficulty, but the kind of difficulty that an expert theologian keenly relishes. Composite photography is a theological speciality.

It is sensed, however, by the more acute politico-religionists that a major difficulty in making God attractive to the general is that the Second Person of the Trinity was a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with

grief. This was an admitted fact in one's boyhood. That *Jesus wept* we knew perfectly well, for, when texts had to be "learnt by heart," every youngster, for obvious reasons, made this brevity of revealed information his first choice. It would have been irrelevant in those days to suggest that Jesus laughed—or even smiled.

There are signs, however, that it is considered imperative that Jesus be now offered to the world in merry guise. A weeping Jesus gathers no moss. Hugh Redwood has been assuring his readers that "there is many a smile in the Bible." The Rev. Leslie Weatherhead is informing us that it is a mistake (this has probably been revealed to him in a dream) to think of Jesus as painfully serious; far from it—his eyes were ever twinkling. These gentlemen follow in the footsteps of the late G.K.C., who was never tired of impressing upon us the jolliness of the Gospel of Christ. Is not the authenticity of Holy Church itself, based upon one of Jesus's puns? Clerics are considering the "putting over" of a Cheerful Christianity as a matter of urgency. Up go the Oracles of God, once more, for alteration and repair; the word has gone forth that a Jovial Jesus is to be Slogan Number One. It may be safely prophesied that other clerics will soon be joining the glad throng that goes hurrying along. Then we shall have presented, with appropriate *décor*, a Rollicking Revelation. To the cry of Mirth Abounding, the Churches will be packed with happy and pious crowds, and any old-fashioned fiddle-faced fanatics will be relegated to the back-seats for the remainder of their unnecessary lives.

It appears to us that the jokes of Jesus require a highly sensitive palate. We agree with Mr. Redwood that there are smiles in the Bible though it is questionable whether the two of us would smile at the same things. We, for instance, are particularly fond of that story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. The conduct of that great One-Godite when he saw the Baal-ites petitioning their third-rate deity, interests us:—

It came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, Cry aloud; for he is a god: either he is talking or he is pursuing or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked.

Mr. Redwood will see the humour of this. He will see how the prophet of the Most High approached another man's conception of God with becoming reverence and decorum. He will notice how quickly Elijah realized that the deep feelings of other men must not be outraged. Their sincerity was unquestionable, for

they cried aloud and cut themselves, after their manner, with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.

Yes, there are smiles in the Bible! Mr. Redwood, we know, will enjoy reading of the total extermination of the Amalekites and Midianites, and how they "kept on begetting" in spite of such a discouragement. He will find entertainment in the story of the Deluge and the ill-ventilated ark; though, here again, it is likely that he and Mr. Walt Disney will not laugh in the same places. A Novel without a Purpose may embody a wholesome ethic, should one have the wit to discern it; there are smiles in the Bible, but one must be alert enough to discover them.

Artemus Ward put a label on his less obvious facetiousness: This is a Joke. Two thousand years ago, this device might well have been employed by Omnipotence. It would have relieved Mankind of a Load of Mischief.

T. H. ELSTON.

Changing Creeds

THE Atheist of to-day has to be a much busier fellow than of old. Iconoclasts like Bradlaugh and Ingersoll had never to contend with such turns and devices as Holism (Smuts), Progressive Revelation (Gore), the "numinous" (Webb), the "noological spirit" (Rudolf Eucken), the "bio-field" (Lodge), or the "entelechy" in the newer types of animism (McDougal) and vitalism (Joad, Le Roy). If he is to be comprehensive in his criticism the Atheist will be expected to follow these shifting faiths into every nook and cranny in which they may seek refuge. Any onslaught in the traditional manner is likely to draw from the Christian the remark, "We have changed our ground. We are not there any longer. Your battering ram falls harmless on vacuity."

Now while I think it most advisable for the sceptic to track down his opponents through all their twistings and turnings, I am also of the belief that an attack in the older fashion of Hume and Kant, and later of Bradlaugh, is very far from being ineffective. Let us meet the religionist in his newer lines of defence, certainly, but do not let us encourage him to believe that old scores are thus wiped out.

There used to be five stock arguments for the existence of God. The more eminent theologians of to-day renounce them. "No one to-day is convinced of the traditional arguments for God's existence," writes one of them (Alexander)¹ while another (Webb) considers they have "crumbled before damaging criticism."² Now this may be true, but to invite us to ignore those exploded arguments is to draw attention away from certain fatal defects of the theist's case, in whatever form presented. To admit the failure of the arguments from ontology, design, first cause, etc., is to concede that God is redundant as moral governor, first cause and law-maker. No matter what new evidences are offered, the anti-theist rebuttal of the stock arguments is still applicable.

Let me illustrate. As against the doctrines of omnipotence and omnibenevolence the Atheist contended that God cannot at the same time be all-good and all-powerful, for such a God would be able to avoid or prevent the evils which exist, most of them not of man's doing. The Rev. C. Webb, after conceding that the classical arguments have broken down, bases his case for the existence of God on what he calls direct mystic intuition. But even if we allow for the moment that through this avenue we may approach a deity, that does not relieve Him of the responsibility for the cruelty and waste evident in nature, His supposed handiwork. Lloyd Morgan posits a God who functions as the creator of emergents. But this does not make God any more necessary as first cause, nor does it excuse the blunders which would have to be attributed to Him in the painful and wasteful evolution of those emergents.

Christians would like us to forget about their past losses on the old line of argument. But the situation is simply that the defects in the old arguments represent a debt owed by their religious propagators, a debt, moreover, which their spiritual descendants of to-day are endeavouring to cover by false currency.

G. H. TAYLOR.

¹ Space, Time and Deity.

² Moral Values.

Portrait of a Bookseller

IF ever business had attracted me away from literature and art, I think the kind of work I should have chosen would have been selling books. How wonderful it must be to own a fine stock of great (and not so great) literature, to be able to browse among the most famous books, to be surrounded by the life-work of some of the most eminent men and women this grey old world of ours has produced. Customers are scarce, perhaps, but what does that matter? There is not a moment to waste in a universe of books. Their variety is astonishing. How can life be tired and stale when at hand are books on every conceivable subject, on every aspect of life and letters, humorous and witty, serious and sad, controversial and scientific?

Do you like literary criticism, gossip about books, perhaps your favourite books? There on that shelf are the greatest of literary critics. Is it poetry which interests you?—and the poets of the world have packed their wonder-art in those many volumes yonder. Fiction?—there are rows and rows of famous novels and romances, the imaginative creations of great genius, ready to whirl you away into the realms of love, mystery and villainy. Is your heart in philosophy or science, in economics or history, or even in mathematics?—many volumes stare you in the face ready to give up their treasures for the mere asking. And, of course, there are dozens of other subjects upon which you may set your fancy and study, or wile away an hour.

Browsing through the pages of a work sent to me by one of my book-loving friends (whose collection, by the way, surpasses mine, and is the only thing I have against him), I found a kindred soul—who, but for the fact that he had written down his thoughts, subsequently published, would have lived and died, like millions of others, unhonoured and unsung. *The Private Papers of a Bankrupt Bookseller*—that is the title of the book, and it is published by Jonathan Cape at 3s. 6d. net. Those of you who love books should get hold of this one. I do not know whether booksellers, as a rule, are good critics. Are there many who, when not selling books, write and publish fine literary criticism? Do booksellers, taken as a whole, love their books, often being loth to sell them? Can they discourse on the merits of particular books, not because they are salesmen, but because they love them? (I can vouch for artists, almost starving, heartbroken to have to sell their work over which they have lavished their skill and creative fancy.)

But this book is, I think, quite unique. The name of the author is not given, for, alas, he committed suicide two or three years after he commenced business. He bought, after the war (in which he was wounded), with a small capital, and perhaps less business knowledge, a bookselling business which was not paying. He paid too much for it, we are told, and he paid an absurd rent. He got into difficulties, and anyone who reads his book (which he left behind him in manuscript), can perhaps see why. The bank and his creditors came down on him, and he put his head in a gas oven. It is a heart-breaking tragedy.

Well, here are his thoughts, and comments, and reveries, and criticisms. He found himself among his beloved books, "the Chosen," he calls them, his children—"and like children too, they will leave him." And how he loved his books!

That dreadful pleasure—that pleasurable dread that the mother knows—is mine. With infinite labour I have got these children of mine, and my happiness will be their going out into the world, just as a mother's happiness lies in her children's going forth from her fireside. The mother's misery, too, is mine.

The more carefully the Christian legislation of the (Roman) Empire is examined . . . the more evident, I think, it will appear that the golden age of Roman Law was not Christian, but Pagan.—*Lecky*.

I will not part with any of my darlings without a pang. It may be, none will go without a prayer. But all will go—nay, all must go—for these have no permanent abiding place with me, if I have to live—and if they have to live out their usefulness.

The book is divided into short chapters, each in its own way, complete. This makes it a bedside book, if you like, or one to be picked up, opened at random, and something good found at the first picking. I like his preparing a card to be put in the window—"A book, not for to-day, but for all time," and then never using it. It savoured too much of business, he felt, and "the bookseller," he contended, "is always a gentleman, and most chivalrous and gallant at that."

He describes his customers with whimsical eyes. They were really pirates to whom he had to submit. Of course they often wanted books he hadn't got, or different editions from those he had. Why had he not exactly what they wanted? He welcomed their coming, but hated parting with the books they chose. But he rarely liked them. "A very smart lady," he says, "was my customer a few minutes ago. She almost *castigated* me for not having a better selection of guide-books." I think that guide-books must be the only ones a book-loving bookseller can sell with joy.

Naturally he had to have a stock of religious books. He describes going to Church one Sunday, but "the preacher, for all that he said of any interest to me, might have been speaking of the habits of Crustacea or marriage practices in Nyasaland, or the ætiology of rheumatism." And on his return, he pattered among his books. Like so many of us, he remembered the "excellent Sunday reading of his youth"—*Good Words* (which he thought a priggish title), the *Quiver* (almost too light for Sunday reading), *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Holy War*, and the *Sermons of Dr. Blair*. They did him no ill, he tells us, but his present stock "contains few of these works to-day." Well, Sunday, like *Punch*, is not what it used to be. It is no longer a day of rest in the holy sense of the word. It is a day of change and enjoyment. Who, except in some remote provincial village, spends a glorious summer day on Bunyan?

Whether our bookseller was or was not a believer, is not clear, but he "was all for faith and not argument in religion." And in this he showed good sense. Faith and faith only is the true prescription for religious belief. He recommends certain devout books, and seems to have loved his Bibles. Of Moffatt's *New Translation*, he says:—

This new Bible is most absorbing. It is like going to see the same play with different actors. It tests one's old knowledge and makes one critical. I love its laconic narrative. . . .

And he loved books of mystery, and imagination and horror. "When I read them," he tells us, "I, too, fancy myself a man of hard, implacable, ruthless cruelty and daring. . . . I am Mephistopheles, Caesar Borgia, Tippoo Sahib, Rasputin, Jack the Ripper, Professor Moriarty, Dracula, Dr. Fu Manchu." And, of course, books for children—as I do myself. Does anyone who read *Aesop's Fables* as a child ever forget it, or *Alice*, or *Gulliver's Travels*? How many of us agree with one of his customers that the best boys' books are *The Talisman*, *The Tale of Two Cities*, and *Treasure Island*?

Our bookseller thinks that the mind that revels in *Alice* is an adult one. "The wonderland of *Alice* is a garden of delight, into which the fortunate visitor may escape from the too terrible realities of existence. All the folk I have met who like *Alice* are grown up and intellectual." He thinks *Little Women* and the

Mill on the Floss are great books for girls; and he complains that "good A.B.C. books do not exist now, but they ought to. It is a defect."

And he likes best among American authors, O. Henry—"better than I like Rudyard Kipling,"—as well as Jack London, Edna Ferber, H. L. Mencken, and Ambrose Bierce. For Elbert Hubbard he has a good word—"he made American men—business men—listen, and how much American idealism owes to Elbert Hubbard, it would be difficult to assess."

But one could go on almost interminably. Hundreds of books are mentioned in these *Private Papers* with wise and sometimes witty comments from all sorts of curious angles. And through all his meanderings into the byways and highways of literature, one senses the depressed outlook on life which his battle to live forced upon him—the sad struggle against overwhelming fate, against which he fought in vain, with its inevitable and culminating tragedy. "Why do I maunder on like this?" he cries. "Why don't I grapple with my fate and master my destiny?" And when everything crashed, "I could peddle books from door to door if it comes to that."

No, he could not peddle books from door to door. There was no seeking for another job. "It will not hurt me; the gas will . . .

. . . this knot intrinsicate
Of life at once untie."

And his book concludes with "Peace, Peace."

I warmly recommend *The Private Papers of a Bankrupt Bookseller* to all book-lovers. Forget his tragedy and revel in his quaint criticisms and conceits. You will not be in the world of Hazlitt or Clutton Brock, it is true. But you will perhaps, in your likes and dislikes, find a kindred soul. At least, in some measure, that is what I have done.

H. CUTNER.

Acid Drops

The editor of *John O' London's Weekly* has evidently been bothered about his statement that "Atheism" is both obsolete and ambiguous, which fatuous remark we dealt with a fortnight ago in "Views and Opinions." In the issue for March 5, the editor explains—

No man is in a position to deny the existence of God. Therefore "Atheist" is meaningless. The proper term is "Agnostic," coined by Professor Huxley to describe himself.

Worse and worse! The Atheist has always been one who is without belief in a god—somebody's god, and that is quite plain. It is also clear that there are very many people who are in that state. To deny, one must know what is meant by the thing denied and a god of some sort is denied by every believer in a particular god. The Atheist is distinguished by denying the existence of "god" as defined by this or that creed, and this is as much the case with the Christian as with any one else. Atheism exists in relation to particular gods. "God" by itself stands for nothing at all. And it is quite absurd to either affirm or deny the existence of that which is undefined and inconceivable.

"Agnostic" is decidedly *not* the proper word, since by itself it means nothing. If it means one is without knowledge of "god," then it is nothing else than Atheism under another name. If it means merely a belief in the possible existence of something more, or other than one knows, then it has no more relation to "god" than it has to the possible existence of an unknown chemical element. "Agnostic," applied to the belief in God was never more than an attempt to escape the obliquity attached to Atheism, or was a product of very muddled thinking. We think the editor of *John O' Lon-*

don's Weekly would be well advised to stick to writing uninformed and uninforming comments on famous men, rather than dabble in subjects with which he is obviously at sea—or underseas.

With regard to the Government resolve to do something to check share-pushing, there is one danger which has not been noted. The suggestion from the Government is that legislation should be passed regularizing the opening of letters. The opening of letters is already in practice, many thousands are opened at the post office, and sealed again, without any indication of its having been done. The danger of this practice is that every extension makes the abolition of the practice more difficult, and one extension leads to another. We would not say the House of Commons will not agree to a formal recognition of the practice, because it will do almost anything in the direction of limiting the freedom of the subject. If the practice is extended, we hope that Parliament will at least have the decency to insist that all opened letters shall be marked so that their recipients know what has been done. Without this we add hypocrisy to a thoroughly detestable practice.

Things seem to be happening. The staid *Daily Telegraph*, in its issue for March 15, suddenly discovers that the Italians "massacred Moslems and Christians alike in Abyssinia." This appears to be a retort drawn from the fact of Italian papers publishing accounts of ill-treatment of natives under our rule. It has taken rather a long time for the *Daily Telegraph* to discover the wholesale murder of old and young, combatant and non-combatant alike, in Abyssinia. Our Government has not yet found it out. But if things happen in this way, we may find Mr. Eden and Mr. Baldwin making the discovery that Italy, in spite of a "gentlemen's agreement," has sent an army corps, fully equipped, to make war against the Spaniards. At present, nothing short of a sworn affidavit, signed by Mussolini, in the presence of the British Ambassador, will make either of the two named gentlemen believe that such a thing is happening. But God help the schoolboy who is found tampering with the loyalty of a member of His Majesty's forces!

"'Liars' am de subject ob ma sermon dis eb'ning," announced the coloured minister. "How many in de congregation done read de 68th chapter ob Matthew?" Nearly every hand in the congregation was raised. "Dat so?" said the minister. "You is just de folk ah wan' to preach to. Dere ain' no 68th chapter ob Matthew."

The *Sydney Morning Herald* every Monday obliges its readers with pulpit utterances. Last week we noticed some of these, but it occurred to us that it is invidious to select for criticism representatives of some of the Churches, and neglect others. So we note that Archdeacon Langley, preaching at St. Andrew's Cathedral has been saying that there were voices that seemed to portend the defeat of the Christian faith. "To avoid this it was necessary to put the House of Christian faith in order and trust God. God's purpose would not fail." Perhaps not, but what is God's purpose? The Houses of Christian faith are by no means agreed upon this point. So all there remains is trust in God. This is equivalent to the political motto of Wait and See.

Archbishop Mowll, preaching in the same building in the evening, told the people of Sydney that God was not to be deceived. The children of God had nothing to fear when they had Him on their side. That was the conviction that animated Ethiopia, one of the oldest Christian nations in the world.

The Rev. James McLeod, preaching in St. Stephen's Church, said that God had certain human qualities. Exactly! It was to demonstrate this truth that Moses was instructed to take up his position in the cleft of the rock.

Speaking in the Scots' Church, the Rev. Dr. A. Boyd Scott informed the people of Sydney that "praying was not enough." We agree. What was wanted in addition was "reading the Bible every day." We disagree.

At the Methodist Conference, the Rev. E. Coplin Thomas said, "all thinkers and observers were in harmony with preachers and prophets."

To the Presbyterians of Sydney the Rev. W. J. Grant said, "Practically everything worth while we owe to Christ." Including, we suppose, that paralysing phenomenon, so much envied by the world's thinkers and observers, the Sunday Sermon. To the people of Sydney, our sincere sympathy.

The Cistercian Monastery of "Our Lady of Spring Bank," Okauchee, Wisconsin, mails out the following appeal:—

"You surely have someone dear to you who has passed into eternity, but who might still need the help of prayers in the pains of Purgatory. Please do not let him wait. The souls released from the cleansing fire are especially thankful to those through whom they have obtained the joys of heaven. . . . The offering which I trust will accompany your petition slip is intended for the education of priests."

The *New York Truthseeker*, to whom we are indebted for the above information, adds the caustic comment: THIS IS A TOUCHING LETTER.

On Friday, February 12, members of the Roman Church in the U.S.A. were permitted to eat meat without God being annoyed. This was brought about by the agents of God getting into communication with him on their special wire. The case for the special dispensation was put convincingly, and God said to Cardinal Hayes: O.K. Go ahead. The reaction of the cattle is unchronicled; but then we know that God does not care for oxen.

The terrible floods that have been devastating parts of America are easily explainable. Past-Master J. A. McSparran, once secretary of the State Department of Agriculture in that country, informs us (according to the *Pennsylvania Grange News*) that "It can be said without fear of successful contradiction that the blessing of God is not upon our nation in these years since the World War. So many things have occurred, violent sandstorms, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and the like with which the hand of man had nothing to do, and must be recognized by all as coming from the hand of God." This gentleman goes on to say that it is not hard to see why God is so displeased: Many people seem to have the idea that the Sabbath is a holiday, and that each person has the right and privilege of doing as he pleases with regard to how that day should be kept. God has learnt them, however, and we expect McSparran will be pleased. God, of course, will have drowned sabbath-observer and sabbath-breaker alike, but in a multiplicity of business one cannot be expected to attend to small details.

Another "life" of Jesus has just been published. Its author is the well-known French Catholic writer, Francis Mauriac, and, needless to say, it fills, as do so many of the thousands of lives of Jesus so far published, "a long-felt want." The Rev. K. E. Kirk says "it forces the question which the sentimentalist is always attempting to evade, 'What think ye of Christ?'"—as if it really matters two hoots what anybody thinks of this mythological personage. Mr. Kirk thinks this *Life* is on an altogether "higher plane than most of the popular 'Lives of Jesus' published in the last fifty years." On the other hand, a Catholic reviewer calls it an "untraditional" Life of Christ—which means, if it means anything at all, that its author did not follow "tradition," and therefore "made up" his *Life of Jesus*.

The same reviewer says, "to many this book will cause offence on every page; to others it will be as illuminative as it is beautiful." The truth is, given a novelist with imagination, and he will find no difficulty whatever in writing-up the details given in the gospels and making another "biography." The results vary with the man. Leo Taxil wrote a *Life* in French slang, an ex-

tremely funny book if one is prepared to admit that most of the incidents described in the gospels are particularly silly viewed from a rational standpoint. Renan wrote what can be truthfully described as a romance; while Eugene Sue wrote one typical of the fiction *feuilleton*, of which he was a master. George Moore wrote, in his *Brook Kerith*, a beautiful piece of prose fiction, while Strauss gave the world in his *Life of Jesus* a world masterpiece of analysis. And yet it is increasingly being admitted that Jesus Christ is as mythical as Osiris. But there is still money in him; and as long as that is a fact, new "Lives" of Jesus are sure to be published.

A Christian discussing Mr. J. B. Priestley's latest work, *Midnight on the Desert* seems very disturbed at the author not giving any "satisfactory" reason for "his inability to subscribe to Christianity." But what would be, to him, a "satisfactory" reason? If there were one to any Christian critic, he himself would be obliged to give up Christianity; and it is surely obvious that if Mr. Priestley gave clear reasons why he was not a Christian there would be dozens of orthodox critics ready to pounce upon those reasons and—if they could—tear them to pieces. Probably the real reasons why Mr. Priestley has given up Christianity is that he has found out that it is not *true*, that it doesn't work, and that it inculcates a particularly servile mind and a hopelessly credulous spirit and outlook.

The critic asks Mr. Priestley, "can anything except the Christian tradition finally be efficient in safeguarding freedom? Freedom of the individual and freedom of thought?" This surely is about the greatest piece of impertinence one could conceive. Fancy *Christianity* giving people "freedom of the individual and freedom of thought." Readers of this journal need not be reminded that the greatest enemy freedom of thought ever had to contend with was Christianity, that is, the genuine article, not the watered-down apology we are so often offered at this day. Yet these people calmly pretend it is they and not the Freethought Party which has fought for freedom! It looks as if the time may come when Christians will loudly proclaim that they and nobody else are the only true, freedom-loving Atheists in the world.

Father D'Arcy is one of the pet scholars of the Roman Catholic Church. He is giving a series of talks on the wireless, and one of his "marvellous" epigrams which must have captured the imagination of many if not all of his fundamentalist listeners was, "Those who sneer at the devil are his prize dupes." Poor devil! fancy having to bear with this kind of drivel—drivel, be it remembered, which is paid for and broadcasted to the world, as well as defended by religious people like Sir John Reith. It is difficult to believe sometimes that we live in the year of grace, 1937.

Here is an extract—reproduced in the *Universe*—from a Lenten Pastoral letter:—

From halfpenny fly-sheets to sixpenny volumes the country is flooded with a literature that leaves nothing sacred, nothing pure. Religion is attacked on every side by men utterly ignorant both of God and of the requirements of the human soul. The Holy Scriptures are blasphemed. The divinity of Jesus Christ and the mystery of human redemption are mocked and derided. Atheism is advocated, and that by a class of men who ignore the first elements of truth and the first principles of life.

In case anyone should imagine that this is a *modern* diatribe against Russia, or the Freethought Party in this country, it will be interesting to note the date at which it was written. It is exactly 50 years ago—February, 1887. Things do not seem to have changed much in the religious world since then.

"Every major question in history," declared Mr. Hilaire Belloc to several hundred teachers and students at Fordham University Graduate School in New York, "is

a religious question." Whether this is literally true may be open to discussion; but that the religious question is one of the most fundamental of all questions is obviously true. And it is one of the reasons for the existence of the National Secular Society.

The vicar of Streatham addressed the girls of a local school which was celebrating (if that is the right word) its Jubilee by listening to a sermon in Streatham Church. "Young Girls," said the vicar in his address, "are like a river, beginning in a small stream, gradually becoming a mighty river, and at last wide and strong falling into the sea. May you all whatever your beginnings, end as the great river." We imagine the parents will object to the advice that their daughters should one day fall into the sea.

In a semi-serious article in the *Daily Herald*, Prof. W. J. Gruffyd, of Cardiff, wrote an article on "St. David," on St. David's Day. Prof. Gruffyd admits the mythical nature of all stories about this problematical saint, but concludes:—

This simple Christian would to-day bow his head in shame at the sight of the distressed areas in Wales, and would most certainly start a campaign of prayer and fasting against the cynical and stony-hearted Government which allows such things to be.

But surely St. David (and all the houseless Welsh) would be more piously sincere if they addressed their remonstrances to St. David's God. He ought either to have "moved the hearts" of the politicians, or, in the absence of any "kind hearts" amongst that fraternity, God might have used a tiny portion of His Omnipotence sufficiently to provide His Own People (i.e., the Welsh, of course), with the "daily bread" the Lord's Prayer mentions.

The Rev. Thomas Tiplady, whose "church" appears to the passer-by as indistinguishable from any other Cinema, except that the commercial cinema charges slightly higher prices, has discovered a new interpretation of "the Gift of Pentecost." It has taken a long time for the justification of the Holy Ghost's "cloven tongues of fire," but it has come at last. Through the Film "the church must speak to the people in the language wherein they were born." It is evidently the aim of the churches to speak to them in the ideology of infancy also.

We are indebted to *The Postman's Knock* for the following information. The Dean of Bocking, the Very Rev. Edgar Rogers, has been expressing himself quite cheerily:—

We say quite frankly that any man who doesn't come to church and say his prayers at the Coronation has the intellect of a rabbit and the emotions of a caterpillar.

It would appear that it is to those who have not the intellect of a rabbit and the emotions of a caterpillar, that the Church are looking for support on this occasion.

Fifty Years Ago

WHAT passes for conviction may often be mere acquiescence. That term, we believe, would accurately describe the creed of nine-nine out of every hundred, in every part of the world, whose particular faith is merely the result of the geographical accident of their birth. Assuredly we do not agree that "all reasonable people will acknowledge that the faith of Christian believers is to a considerable extent most real; nay, in tens of thousands of cases it is the most real thing in their life." Mr. Cotter Morison laboriously refutes this position in his fine volume on *The Service of Man*. Mill denied and derided it in a famous passage of his great essay *On Liberty*. Mr. Justice Stephen denies it in the *Nineteenth Century*. Carlyle also, according to Mr. Froude, said that "religion as it existed in England had ceased to operate all over the conduct of men in their ordinary business; it was a hollow appearance, a word without force in it."

The Freethinker, March 20, 1887.

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No. : CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

G. V. REID.—Apologies, your interesting letter had been overlooked. We are pleased to learn that the very foggy evening at our last meeting in Manchester gave you a definite interest in the N.S.S. We hope the interest will live. The *Bible Handbook* is still in print. Price 2s. 6d.

F. WEBB.—We are familiar with the volumes of the *Republican*, but we should be interested in seeing the volume of the *Gazette Nationale*, for 1793.

"CAPETOWN."—An Atheist is one who is without belief in a God. An Agnostic is one who asserts the impossibility of knowing the truth about certain fundamental philosophical problems—a position which rests on a fundamental confusion of terms—and further confuses the situation by applying the assertion to the belief in God. It is generally used to avoid the term "Atheist." "Rationalism" is a term that was originally used to indicate the doctrine that reason was the sole source of religion as opposed to revelation, and, in philosophy, that "pure reason" whatever that might be, was the sole source of knowledge as opposed to the belief that all knowledge came ultimately through the senses. In recent years the term has been confused with Freethought, which consists in the rejection of the imposition of beliefs by mere authority, whether that authority rests in a Church or a State.

T. RAWSON.—We should like to undertake the task you wish, but we have been taking liberties of late, and must take what rest is possible between now and the Annual Conference.

A. E. CARPENTER.—The N.S.S. has no connexion with Communism or any other 'ism outside its own statement of "Principles and Objects." We agree with you that a man who cannot listen quietly to the expression of opinions with which he disagrees has no title to the name of "Freethinker." We have had to say this many, many times, but it evidently needs saying again. On the other hand, your own attitude on finding that every man who calls himself a "Freethinker" belies the name, does little credit to your own sense of discrimination.

S. WINKWORTH.—Your letter is not likely to rouse the B.B.C. to a sense of elementary fairness, but it will do good nevertheless. The B.B.C. is a greater misleading organ of opinion than any single newspaper we have. The danger of it is that by giving extreme opinion on one side, and a watered down dose of the opposite, it misleads many into believing they are listening to both sides. And so far as we are concerned, we repeat that no man with a proper sense of self-respect would submit to the censorship exercised by the B.B.C. A fee or popularity is small compensation for so great a sacrifice.

W. E. ENGLISH.—Thanks for cutting. We are keeping free from colds, but at the moment feel the need of a rest. Have been working rather hard this year, but will try and get a few days off before the N.S.S. Conference.

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.

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

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

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

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

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

Sugar Plums

Mr. Cohen will deliver his last lecture this season to-day (March 21), in 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.

March 31 marks the closing of the N.S.S. year, and all members' subscriptions, dues, etc., should be forwarded to the General Secretary not later than that day, for inclusion in the annual balance sheet. Until printers, bill-posters, railway companies, etc., agree not to charge for N.S.S. requirements, we must look to our sources of income.

There is also just time for another thing. The Annual Conference will this year be held in Liverpool. It is in order for individual members, as well as Branches, to send in motions for the Agenda. Those wishing to do so, must, however, write at once.

The Second National Congress of Peace and Friendship with the U.S.S.R., held in London last week-end, was valuably informative. The purpose of the Congress as expressed in its name was kept to by all. Particularly impressive was the session devoted to "Cultural Developments in the U.S.S.R." The speakers on this occasion included Sir Bernard Pares of the University of London; Hubert Griffith, Dramatic Critic; Professor W. G. Constable, Asst. Director of the National Gallery; and Dr. G. M. Ververs, Supt. to the London Zoological Society. Each of these speakers was calm, judicial, and when the occasion called for it, critical. But each ungrudgingly gave unstinted praise to the U.S.S.R. for the cultural work accomplished in his own particular sphere. Particularly effective was the speech of Dr. Ververs, who spoke with warmth of the friendships he had formed in the U.S.S.R., and the generous scientific collaboration he had met with. This admixture of friendly enthusiasm with scientific aims, devoid, as it should be, of any feeling of national jealousy and precise political agreement, produced a glow in the large audience—based, no doubt, on their realization that in that way, and in that way only, progress may be both enormous and speedy. One regrets that more meetings of so definitely a humanist significance are not held.

The Dean of Canterbury also was liberal and ungrudging in his testimony to the purely humanistic advances in Russia. He appeared, in fact, to be a little bewildered that in a country where much was abhorrent to him, such good work had been done in connexion with women, child-welfare, and especially with the treatment of criminals. In this, of course, "the U.S.S.R. came very near to Christianity at its best."

Without depreciating the general value of the Dean's utterance on this occasion it is essential to point out that so far from the Russian treatment of criminals being, in any sense, *Christian*, it is based on an idea which Christianity has always held to be abhorrent, viz., that man's conduct is not absolutely under his control, but that, on the contrary, under definite conditions men will act in definite ways. Should these happen to be criminal ways, the most hopeful treatment is to surround the victims with opposing influences. The Christian ideas of "original sin," and the regeneration of mankind by a plan of salvation has stood, fundamentally, in the way of humane treatment for criminals, and the total rejection of the Christian point of view is essential to the slightest progress in this direction.

The South London Branch N.S.S. will terminate its indoor session with this evening's lecture (March 21), and not as stated on the syllabus. Will members and supporters of the Branch please note. Arrangements for the open-air are being made, and another busy and prosperous season is anticipated.

The Annual Meeting of the North East Federation of N.S.S. Branches will be held in the Co-operative Rooms, Green Street, Sunderland, on Sunday, March 21, at 3 p.m. Besides delegates, any member of the N.S.S. may attend. There will be a public meeting in the same building in the evening. The combination of N.S.S. Branches in the North East Area has resulted in some very useful and well-organized work, and, where possible, other areas might consider the formation of similar federations.

We are asked to announce that a meeting will be held at the "Laurie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, on Sunday, April 4, 1937, at 7.30 p.m. (prompt). All who are interested in the formation of a club as a Social and Educational Centre in London for the members of the N.S.S. are invited to attend.

From an American Journal we learn that the bi-centenary of Paine was celebrated at Bordentown, New Jersey, close to Paine's farm at New Rochelle. The celebration was arranged by the Bordentown Historical Society and Thomas Paine Historical National Society. Among the guests were the Hon. P. T. Culbertson, representing the United States of America, Hon. Marcel de Vernueil, representing the French Republic, Hon. R. A. N. Hilyer, British Vice-Consul, at Philadelphia, representing the British Empire, and a number of learned societies.

In the latest issue of the *Howard Journal*, Mr. H. J. Laski writes informingly on the state of society to-day, as revealed in the current *Criminal Statistics*. Mr. Laski makes some excellent suggestions for adding to this official statement certain details which would help us to understand how and why crime occurs. For example, he thinks it would be instructive to know "whether there was or was not, any continuous association with any religious organization." If this were truthfully stated in every case, the public would see—what it ought to know already—that religion has never yet by itself made the slightest improvement on human character. Education, sanitation, better housing, higher wages and even more light in the streets—obviously secular reforms—have reduced the number of crimes on the one hand, while humaner laws (including Probation methods) have reduced the number of prisoners in civilized lands.

Paine and Bourgeois Myths

(Concluded from page 172)

MR. CHAPMAN COHEN is undoubtedly right when, in his preface to the excellent edition of *The Age of Reason*, which he has so cheaply produced, he claims that it was this book which could not be forgiven Paine. It was impossible to bring him into the "tradition" with *The Age of Reason* in his hand. But we do not fully explain this fact unless we link up the revolutionary import of that book with the terror of the ruling classes of England that Paine would undo the work that Wesley boasted of having done in making the oppressed poor submissive to their lot, and in thereby averting revolution.

I cannot believe that the author of *Christianity, Slavery and Labour* is unaware of the social reverberations of Paine's anti-Christian work; and I think it is a pity that he did not complete his otherwise first-rate note on Paine by making this point.

Paine's revolutionary work on social themes might have been forgiven, much as it scared the authorities at the time. *The Rights of Man* could later have been overlaid with liberal vagueness; it could have been forgotten how Paine's analysis of finance fired Cobbett and so led on to Chartist theory. But the successful way in which he fused all the deistic arguments of his age into a single scathing instrument of indignant rationality could not be explained away.

So Paine continued to be blackened, despite the

charm and the warm integrity of his character. Yet malice finds nought to seize on except the vague tale that in the latter part of a worthy life, in the days when he must have felt himself left stranded after having so long taken the currents of his age at their full, he drank somewhat.

Mr. Cohen has analysed the various reviews of Paine that were made of late on account of his centenary, and it is clear that the malice persists, though necessarily in a watered-down form. It tries to deprecate the whole "fuss" about Paine, to write him down as a more-or-less amiable journalist, who is of no very great interest nowadays. This attitude is aided by the latest biography, by Mr. Hesketh Pearson. Mr. Pearson declares that creeds die, but humanity endures—a meaningless statement in any final analysis, for how can humanity be thus severed from the terms that make it human, the historical process of which the "creeds" are so significant a part? So, Mr. Pearson goes on, he means to deal with Paine the man.

Yet this is the Paine who wrote of himself, italicizing as if he had his eye on this future biographer of his: "Who the author of this publication is, is wholly unnecessary to the public, as the object for attention is the doctrine itself, not the man."

Paine, as I have said, is a man of peculiar purity of life, that purity which comes from the organic absorption of basic social ideas; but since his whole life was the utterance of those ideas (in harmony of mind and act) in the terms of his historical position, how on earth is one to separate the "man" from all that constituted the content and purpose of his manhood?

Mr. Pearson, I must add in justice, is worse in bark than bite; for as soon as he gets on with the story, it isn't Paine the "man" that interests him at all, but just Paine himself, Paine the historical agent.

But one can see here, and in the more tolerant reviews, the emergence at last of the myth. Paine the "secular saint" is the form it takes. Paine was a fine fellow, but, of course, we can't get excited over the issues that obsessed him. The "real man" was the Paine who taught his Christian enemies a lesson in that virtue which has nothing Christian in it except the label that has been attached to it—forgiveness of enemies. To a man of Paine's profound purity the whole Christian problem had simply ceased to exist. How the devil could he concern himself with forgiving or not-forgiving fools and knaves when he was concerned only with basic social issues? He might condemn the social evil that bred fools and knaves; but to hate them would be merely to confess that he was as unable to distinguish real cause and effect as they were themselves. So, to abstract this "real man" from Paine's beliefs is not merely to ignore the beliefs, but also to eliminate all meaning from the man himself.

After all that Mr. Chapman Cohen has so effectively written of late in the *Freethinker* on Paine, I think there is not much more to be said, but that this something-more is well expressed in a review of Mr. Pearson's book in *New Masses*:—

The remarkable thing about Paine was his self-denying moral idealism—and in action, his ever-unsatisfied passion for drastic social transformations, for the complete fulfilment of the revolutionary ideas of the middle class. In this thoroughness, as in the fact that he adapted to immediate needs and popularized into great slogans the concepts of earlier theorists, his rôle in his time was not unlike Lenin's in our time. He did much less original thinking than Lenin did, however, and by opposing the Reign of Terror, which was necessary, as we now know, to bourgeois consolidation, he made a serious blunder.

In many ways, however, he spanned his own epoch

and urged reforms which were only to be achieved, if ever under Capitalism, in the course of time and under the pressure of his own class (the petty-bourgeoisie) and that of the Proletariat. No sooner had he arrived in America that he began agitating for Negro freedom. Of women, for whose liberation he also fought, he said, "Over three quarters of the globe Nature has placed them between contempt and misery." Closer, as a petty-bourgeois, to the developing Proletariat, and more aware of its needs and potentialities than were the big bourgeois, he again and again denounced "the crime of poverty" in states calling themselves civilized.

War he repeatedly condemned, recognizing, though imperfectly, its economic origins. "War is the common harvest of all those who participate in the division and expenditure of public money, in all countries." And "Man is not the enemy of Man, but through the medium of a false system of Government."

For "false system of Government," we read to-day, "false system of economy," but in Paine's time, causes were veiled in political terms; and where to-day we should point to material conditions as justification for political transformations, Paine and all his generation used the abstract word Nature. As idealist revolutionism in its extreme form leads logically to anarchism, so Paine, though not in practice an Anarchist, could say, "The instant formal Government is abolished, society begins to act; a general association takes place, and common interest produces common security."

If the real causes of things were sometimes veiled from him, Paine saw correctly the relation between crime and poverty. "Why is it that scarcely any are executed but the poor?" he asks. "The fact is proof, among other things, of a wretchedness in their condition." So he proposed that Governments economise on wars and spend their savings on old-age pensions. And, "when the rich plunder the poor of his rights, it becomes an example to the poor to plunder the rich of his property."

To be sure, most of Paine's concepts may be found buried in Rousseau and Montesquieu or the seventeenth century Utopians. His rôle was to remove these ideas from their learned contexts and make them accessible in the form of epigrammatic slogans, which, for fire and crackling wit, have never been surpassed. His rôle, further, was to continue to urge these slogans long after the big bourgeoisie had done with them. And in this way he became an embarrassment, not only to the reactionaries, but even to his friends. In his case, as in Jefferson's, it was undoubtedly his connexion with the petty-bourgeoisie, the class whose ambitions were to be disappointed in the struggle of the time, that inspired him to continue where the big bourgeoisie had left off, detesting as he did the parasitism of finance as much as he detested the parasitism of the clergy and the baronage.

And so in action, committed whole-heartedly though he was to revolution in general, he did not commit himself, except on temporary issues, to any particular group or programme; for the reason that any entrenched group, any immediately workable programme, must at that time have been the expression of that financial faction of the middle-class which he distrusted. We cannot say that he divined the fate of his own class in advance; we can only say that he acted like a man very sensitive to the realities.

I think that these remarks by F. W. Dupee sum up the historical position of Paine with great clarity. They also serve to illustrate the magnificent unity of theory and action that made Paine such a portent. I wish to emphasize this point, for I hope to follow it up shortly with a further examination of the nineteenth century Freethinking movement, and to show how it was precisely that unity which was lost through the abstraction of "rationalism" from its social issues.

JACK LINDSAY.

Botanical Benefactors of Mankind

INNUMERABLE are the forms of floral life that man has brought under cultivation for domestic use. All the cereals such as wheat, oats, barley and rye have been evolved by human agency from wild species and varieties of grass. The sugar-cane is also a member of the grass family, and consists of a jointed stalk bearing long-sheathed leaves. Ascending to a height of twelve feet, the plant blossoms at its apex with a feather-like plume. As the cane ripens the outer surface of its jointed stem hardens, while the stem's interior develops a spongy tissue containing a juice that thickens and becomes extremely sweet as the cane matures.

Apparently the sugar cane was first cultivated in the far East, perhaps in India or Cochin China. From the Indian Ganges sugar of crude manufacture was introduced into China, but we are indebted to the Arabs for the refining arts which furnish fine sugar. The Arabs extensively cultivated the cane and carried it Westward from Persia to Morocco, and the Spaniards at a later time introduced it into the Atlantic Islands and the tropical regions of America.

The cane is essentially a tropical growth, and its cultivation is consequently confined to warm climates, whereas the beet-root is easily produced in temperate regions, and its cropping as a source of sugar is successfully pursued in Europe. Now, cane sugar has been largely superseded by that obtained from the beet, and it is also derived from the juices of the maple and sorghum.

The various spices have long been esteemed for their medicinal properties. The leading condiments are native to the forests of Asia, especially in the Isles and along the coasts of the Indian Ocean. For centuries the Moluccas have been famous as the Spice Islands, and to these the maritime peoples of Western Europe undertook lengthy voyages which initiated the wonderful discoveries of new lands in the fifteenth century.

A climbing shrub, indigenous to the wooded areas of the Malabar Coast, produces a fruit that provides black pepper. This is now widely grown in the Malay Archipelago, Siam, the Philippines and the West Indies. Long a commercial link between Europe and India, the peppercorn was extensively utilized as tribute and the term "pepper-corn rents" still survives to remind us of an ancient custom.

The clove is native to the Moluccas, and is under cultivation in other tropical lands. This was once an important article of commerce, the Portuguese possessing a trade monopoly until the Dutch superseded them in the Far East. The spice is now raised in Zanzibar, the Malays and Guiana.

The nutmeg is another valued spice which is the seed of a small tree that grows wild in the Moluccas and Banda, where it has been cultivated for many centuries. It reached Europe from the East, and is now grown in tropical America, Madagascar and other regions. The nutmeg is the kernel of the seed, while its outer covering constitutes "mace."

Cinnamon is prepared from the bark of a shrub of the laurel group found wild in the forests of Ceylon, and in the eighteenth century cinnamon plantations were successfully established in that beautiful island. It is now produced in tropical climes in both Eastern and Western hemispheres. The cultivated plant soon reverts to its wild state as its fruit is eagerly devoured by birds who scatter the seeds in the forests adjoining the plantations.

Wheat has been cultivated from prehistoric times, and there are reasons for suspecting that in its wild

state its original home was Mesopotamia. It was known to the Swiss Lake Dwellers in the Bronze Age, and it was grown in China in 2700 B.C., where it was regarded as a gift of the gods. Wheat was known in ancient Israel, and dates to a very remote era in Egypt. It was, however, a stranger in the New World until the sixteenth century, and according to Humboldt it made its first appearance in Mexico from Spain, and he states that he surveyed in Quito "the earthen vessel in which a monk had brought the first wheat grains sown in South America."

The culture of wheat now extends from Norway, Siberia and Canada to South Africa, Australia and the Argentine. The cereal succeeds in fertile and sufficiently stiff soil with moderate moisture and sunlight, and has become easily adapted to a very extensive territory. It is fairly considered the staple nutrient of the civilized globe. British America, the Argentines, the United States, Roumania, India and Chili constitute the chief centres of export to other countries.

Nearly one quarter of the entire human race is practically dependent upon rice as food. The grass which bears the rice grains is a moisture-loving growth which flourishes in damp alluvial soils in the tropics, particularly in regions subject to flooding by overflowing streams. Its primal homes were probably the vast river valleys of China and the low-lying districts near the Bay of Bengal. It is conjectured that the cultivation of rice in China extends back to 2800 B.C. There it was seemingly first cultivated, whence it later spread to India and the Euphrates. It was apparently known in Mesopotamia many centuries before it reached Syria and Egypt. The Arab subsequently brought the grain to Italy and Spain. Rice is chiefly consumed by its cultivators, so its commercial importance is negligible in comparison with that of corn.

Rye, barley and oats are widely cropped in temperate regions. Oatmeal is highly esteemed as an inexpensive and nourishing food. Some assert that its consumption is largely accountable for Scottish grit. Rye remains the chief bread stuff of Germany. Maize is a distinctively American plant indigenous to the warmer latitudes of that Continent. Its cultivation now extends to Africa, where it has become an important part of the dietary of many native tribes. Although the maize or Indian corn-belt does not reach far beyond the 42nd parallel of north latitude it was estimated in 1906 that 120,000 square miles of soil in the United States were under corn cultivation.

The potato is another plant of importance. This excellent vegetable is not a root but a tuber, and has been developed by artificial selection from the enlarged underground section of the stem. Its aboriginal habitat was in temperate South America, and it was cultivated by the native races of that region long before the Spanish invasion. The Spaniards first introduced it to Europe, and from Spain it spread to the Netherlands, Burgundy and Italy, but was only grown in gardens as a floral curiosity. It came to England from Virginia at the time of the voyages of Hawkins and Drake. Sir Walter Raleigh is said to have planted potatoes at his Devonshire home at Hayes and on his estate in Munster, but a long time elapsed before it was adopted as an article of food.

In the seventeenth century the potato was utilized somewhat dubiously as a food for pigs and cattle and then it was suggested that it might prove useful to very poor people, or even help in times of famine from failure of the corn crops. The plant proved successful when grown as a comestible in Ireland, from whence its cultivation spread to Lancashire, and gradually extended throughout England and Scotland. Thus, by the middle of the eighteenth century it had

grown into an invaluable field crop in the British Isles. In France the tuber was long stigmatized as the cause of leprosy and other evils. Frederick the Great encouraged its cultivation in Prussia, and earlier prejudices concerning it have now been abandoned in every land.

The potato has been immensely improved in quality, and innumerable varieties have been evolved. It remains the staple food of Ireland, despite the fact that the destruction of the crop from the ravages of disease in the forties of the nineteenth century caused an appalling famine succeeded by a wholesale emigration which halved the population of the island.

The date is an inexpensive, palatable and nutritious fruit, and has been the chief food of the borderers of the deserts of Northern Africa and Arabia for untold ages. The majestic date palm, which sometimes displays itself in solitary glory amid the desert sands still flourishes in the regions it adorned thousands of years ago. Well adapted to hot and arid surroundings, it has never become acclimatised to temperate conditions. One ardent admirer of the palm acclaims it as: "The symbol of beauty alike to Hebrew and Hellenes . . . the palm passed readily to the suggestion of victory over death and glorious immortality."

From remote centuries till to-day the fertilization of the date palm has been artificially assisted by severing the male flowers, when their stamens are nearly mature and suspending them over the blossoms of the female tree. Thus the waste of pollen incidental to the palm's natural wind fertilization is very largely avoided. For, in many palm groves one male tree may serve to fructify as many as fifty fruit-bearing plants. And not merely is the fruit of the tree the staple eatable in Egypt, Persia and Arabia, but the palm is in considerable measure the primary wealth of the people.

T. F. PALMER.

The One, the Two, the Three and the Many

If these titles have a flavour of the occult, we must remind ourselves that they represent answers to questions that perhaps we have no right to ask. The asking is due to our mental habit of demanding a "cause" for every effect. Some philosophers maintain that we are entitled to apply the law of "cause and effect" only to sense-impressions and their sequences. At any rate, it is easy to see that if our psychic faculties developed under the stimulus of the sense-impressions—to which the law does apply—we should quite naturally have acquired the habit of regarding that law as something absolutely fundamental—like Space and Time. On the other hand, by Kant, and many other philosophers, "causation" is set down among the "categories," and would thus be applicable to all "effects," including our psychic selves and the sense-impressions they receive and react to. In other words, we are free to ask: "What is the 'cause' of our selves and of the sense-impressions?"

Here, then, we are on highly controversial ground. The limited view of causation is frequently associated with the belief that our psychic faculties react *only* to sense-impressions; that, for instance, we think by the aid of language, admittedly derived from sense-impressions; and that the most impressive feats of imagination are really kaleidoscopic shufflings of materials originally derived from sense-impressions.

Per contra, a very large number of philosophers—including most religious thinkers and all mystics—believe that we can react psychically also to *non-sense-impressions*; attributed either definitely to a Deity and

immaterial Spirits, or more vaguely to a "Universal Mind" or to "Nature." Such a belief obviously opens the door to a wide range of fanciful, imaginative, occult and mystical ideas, which may readily culminate in one of the names we are discussing.

If we wish to choose between these two opposing philosophies, we must not omit to take into account the important part played by *desire* in determining belief. We *desire* that the Universe should be controlled by a Great Intelligence with a Purpose, that the Purpose should include our welfare, and that we should know enough of It to enable us to adjust our petty purposes in accord with It. We do not take kindly to the idea that the World-Process rolls majestically on its way, regardless of any special claims to consideration from Humanity.

Accordingly, every religion prepares more or less reassuring answers to our reiterated "Whence, Whither, Why?" Is it not a strong *prima facie* probability that, in the plentiful absence of knowledge, imaginative invention should intervene to provide answers in accord with the hopes and desires of the questioners?

Let us now glance for a moment at the historical development of these Names.

In the earliest days, men became conscious of what they took to be the power of initiating movement. When, without their intervention, things moved, they naturally supposed that invisible Beings, with powers similar to their own, "caused" the motion. Certain of these Beings, obviously more powerful than men, would soon rank as gods. Thus we get the "first edition" (so to speak) of the *Many* who, from being Prime Movers each in some branch of *Nature's* activities, would eventually become the "causes" of all our sense-impressions; and later (since in those days this definite cleavage between mind and matter had not been proposed), of ourselves.

The subsequent reduction of the *Many* to the *One* seems to have preceded that cleavage, which however was destined to play a great part in the development of both relatively rational and irrational forms of religion. The unification necessarily followed from the cumulative operation of the cause-demanding habit, which tends to group an ever-increasing number of "effects" under an ever-decreasing number of "causes." Under this impulsion, the scientific investigation and classification of sense-impressions has established (though this is now disputed) the universal validity of the law of "cause and effect" among them, even envisaging "energy" or "electricity" as a "Prime Mover" or First (ascertainable) Cause of all phenomena. It is natural that religious enquiry and reflection should pursue a similar unifying course, and thus reach the conception of "the *One*."

Unfortunately for the religious supporters of this conception, serious difficulties were encountered by the unifying process when the *moral* field came to be explored. Here another—and still more dubious—tendency of the human mind gave trouble, viz., the tendency to apotheosise certain "qualities" commonly expressed in language by adjectives, or (if generalized and abstracted) by nouns. Thus the adjectives "good" and "bad" (expressing human approval and disapproval) are apotheosised into "Good" and "Evil"—independent entities with Divine status, or something like it. We are now confronted with the necessary option either of "explaining away" the existence of "the Evil" in a Universe controlled by "the *One*" ("the Good"), or of admitting the proposition of "the *Two*." Should we not be wise to conclude (like the mathematician who finds that he is getting irrational solutions to his equations) that we are engaged in a fruitless quest, and are seeking answers to "impossible" questions?

It would be impossible here to sketch even in slight detail the evolution of the ideas of "the *Three*," "the *Three* in *One*," or "One in *Three*."

The human mind which had shown great—and, to a certain extent, critical—activity in reaching the conceptions of "the *One*" and "the *Two*," was now clearly caught napping. Sheer uncritical credulity had long fastened upon two quite inadmissible sources of information—"inspiration" and "sacred writings." The latter flowered into prophecies—more and more hectic—of a god descending to earth; suffering martyrdom; reascending to Heaven; and finally returning to the earth in power and glory. Soon biographies of the god began to appear. Simultaneously a Jew-Greek philosophy, which tinctured its monotheism with apotheosised abstractions such as "Wisdom," "the Logos," etc., supported or invented the biographies as allegorical of events which had actually taken place beyond the realms of Time and Space; and helped to provide the new religion with a third name—the Holy Ghost. Many promising adherents, however, had a strong inherited bias for monotheism. Therefore, a formula was devised by which the amenities were preserved, and the monotheists gathered into the fold.

Thus we get "the *Three*" (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost), conveniently synthesised into "Three in *One*" or "One in *Three*."

In some such fashion a religion was founded for which, though not inferior to even the worst of the religions of human sacrifice in its output of "blood and tears," and though autumn leaves now hang in profusion from its drooping boughs, the highest claims are still being made; based mainly on the high moral standards associated with it. On the intellectual side, however, it is difficult to place it on a level with the religions of "the *One*" or "the *Two*."

Lastly we have the doctrine of "the *Many*"—a second edition so thoroughly revised that it bears scarcely any relation to the first. We doubt whether the idea of "cause" is of any importance in this philosophy. It concentrates on opposition to the notion of "the *One*," which is regarded as merely the result of a mental habit, and not necessarily indicative of any objective fact of the Universe.

As to the future, it would be unwise to attempt to set bounds to the progress of knowledge; but it does look as if man will never be able to jump off his own shadow, or successfully extend the idea of "cause" beyond the limits of the sense-impressions from which it sprang. These, too, are locked in an embrace with our psychic faculties so close, that no philosophy has so far succeeded in disengaging it. We are tempted to add: "and never will!"

G. TODHUNTER.

Service at all Hours

(Planned Economy in Heaven)

Now Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
Were forced into a huddle;
So many prayers ascending up
Made life a daily muddle.

For since broadcasting came in style,
(As earth turns daily o'er),
They had to listen every hour,
Throughout the twenty-four.

At last they hit upon a plan,
And now the problem lifts;
While Father, Son and Ghost now work
In daily eight hour shifts.

WILLIAM WIRT HARVEY, M.D.

Boston, Mass.

Budget of Paradoxes

AUGUSTUS DE MORGAN's *Budget of Paradoxes*, mostly devoted to circle-squarers and interpreters of the Apocalypse, on p. 103, reviews jointly:—

- (1) Paine's *Rights of Man*.
- (2) Mary Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman*, 1792.
- (3) Lancelot Light, *Rights of Boys and Girls*, 1792.

On (1) "silly government prosecutions gave it what it never could have got for itself."

No. 3 is a satire on the first two, "utterly unworthy of Dr. Parr," whom De M. thinks the author. Dr. Parr later subscribes to the fund for Hone, when Hone was tried in 1817 for blasphemous parody.

p. 162. "Paine's *Age of Reason* must be republished when the time comes, to show what stuff governments and clergy were afraid of at the beginning of the century. I would never have seen the book if it had not been prohibited, a bookseller put it under my nose with a fearful look round him, and I could do no less than buy a work which had been so complimented by Church and State. And when I had read it, I said in my mind to Church and State, 'Confound you, you have taken me in worse than any reviewer I ever met with.'"

p. 467. "Hallam remarks that the Authorized Version of the Bible is not in the language of the time of James I., it is not the English of Raleigh or Bacon. Were Raleigh and Bacon the true expositors of the English of their time? Were they not rather the incipient promoters of a change which was successfully resisted by the Authorized Version among others?"

He quotes Robert Record's *Dialogue*, 1556, to show that the Authorized Version is in the common talk of 1556.

p. 247, he reviews G. J. Holyoake's *Reasoner*, 1847, "Is there sufficient proof of the existence of God." De M. considers God a convenient but unprovable hypothesis, and quotes Laplace and "cette hypothèse là."

p. 776, he suggests that God may be infinitely rarefied oxygen.

p. 381. "From much study of the Middle Ages I have brought away a high respect for the priest in everything but religion, and the physician in everything but medicine."

C. HARPUR.

Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER" THAT ROYAL COMMISSION

SIR,—If forceful and graceful irony could move politicians as in the days of Defoe or Swift, your leader in last week's issue would perform that miracle. The Royal Commission is a grand idea. At least it could not be dull. It would have to find—(1) that God is only a dream, or (2) that God is, and does everything (no more of the "ninety-nine were killed, and one was providentially saved" kind of thing); or, (3) that God is, and does nothing but silently preside over Nature's gigantic crossword puzzle; or, (4) that God is a "Sleeping Partner," who occasionally wakes up and does something. If (4) were adopted, the Commission would have to put the question—Whose Partner? If not ours, armaments and gas-masks, as you say, are waste of money.

Clearly, there is ample cash-value in the enquiry.

G. TODHUNTER.

VALE!

SIR,—News has been received that Alexander Muir, who was a member of the Committee of West London Branch N.S.S., has been killed in action in Madrid. He joined the International Column, not only to fight against Fascism, but to fight for Freethought. We who knew him regret the loss of so fine a man, and feel that words are such poor things to express one's thoughts in such tragic circumstances. The Branch extend deepest sympathy to the relatives of Alick Muir.

C. TUSON,
Secretary, West London Branch N.S.S.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON

OUTDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30, Mr. 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): 7.30, Thursday, March 25, Mr. C. Tuson—"The Catholic Church, Fascism and the N.S.S."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Primrose Restaurant, 64 Heath Street, Hampstead, N.W.3, one minute from Hampstead Underground Station): 7.30, A Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Alexandra Hotel, South Side, Clapham Common, S.W.4, opposite Clapham Common Station, Underground): 7.30, Mr. C. S. McKelvey—"History of the Past."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, S. K. Ratcliffe—"England and America—Now."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.): 7.30, Dr. Har Dayal, M.A., Ph.D.—"Christian Missions in India and the East."

COUNTRY

INDOOR

ASHINGTON (Young Mens' Forum): 7.30, Tuesday, March 23, Mr. J. T. Brighton "Evolution."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Shakespeare Rooms, Edmund Street): 7.0, Mr. H. W. Cottingham—"Evolution."

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Laycock's Cafe, entrance via passage facing Burtons): 7.15, Mr. A. C. Dutton—"The Science of Sexology."

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Herbert P. Turner (Burnley)—"Passover, Crossover or Crucified?"

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, Dr. M. Friedlander, M.A.—"The Mandate and the Jewish-Arab Question."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Dramatic Performance.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Transport Hall, entrance in Christian Street, Liverpool): 7.0, General Discussion of Criticisms of Freethought point of view.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (The Picture House, Market Street, Manchester): 7.0, Mr. Chapman Cohen—"What is the Matter with Religion?" Reserved Seats 6d. and 1s. each.

NORTH EAST FEDERATION OF N.S.S. BRANCHES (Co-operative Hall, Green Street, Sunderland): 3.0, A meeting.

PRESTON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hesketh Buildings): 7.15, Mr. G. A. Smith (Preston)—"Capital Punishment; a Necessity."

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Green Street, Sunderland): 7.30, Messrs J. T. Brighton, H. Dalkin, and others.

TEES-SIDE BRANCH N.S.S. (Jubilee Hall, Leeds Street, Stockton): 7.0, Monday, March 22, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

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