

THE
FREETHINKER

• EDITED by CHAPMAN COHEN •
— Founded 1881 —

Vol. I, VII.—No. 37

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 1937

PRICE THREEPENCE

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Views and Opinions

Science and Religion

THE historical fight of the Christian Church with Science (itself a phase of the larger conflict of religion with science) still goes on. I say the fight *with*, rather than *between* the Church and Science, because science never set out to fight religion. All that science did, all that it asked, was to continue its work and place the results at the service of mankind. It was the Church, carrying humanity's curse, a "sacred" book, that declared war on science. The first demand of the Church was that nothing which contradicted established religious doctrines should be taught by science—which really meant that nothing should be discovered or taught that was contrary to the Bible. (Twentieth century Nazi and Proletarian Science is but a faint echo of the early and strident demand of the Church.) That decree meant the death of science in the ancient world, and had not the development of science continued outside Christendom, the revival of Europe would have been delayed for many centuries.

About the fourteenth century of the Christian era some one discovered a compromise. It was said that a teaching might be true in science, but false in theology, and *vice versa*. This type of compromise is not yet dead. It exists with those of the clergy who talk evolution in ordinary life, and special creation in church; and among those of the laity who commence a profession of faith with "according to my religion, I believe," etc. A final phase of this long fight of the Church against positive science is now fashionable. In this phase the legitimacy of science searching where it pleases, discovering what it can, is admitted, but after all, it is said, science cannot tell us everything—it cannot, in fact tell us anything of fundamental importance. For a final analysis of the world and of man we must fall back on religion. It is religion alone that can disclose the secret of man's nature and destiny.

The fight thus continues. It continues because it must. It was not science that began the warfare; it was the Church with a "revealed" religion that ex-

plained the origin of the world, of man, and of morals. All that science has ever asked is to be let alone, to be permitted to go on with its work. It was not the fault of science that what it discovered was in direct conflict with established religious teaching. It was not the fault of science that when God "revealed" how the world was made, how different languages came, what was the cause of disease, and the structure of the universe, his revelation was found not to be in accord with the facts. That may have been due to God's forgetfulness, or to his having selected faulty channels of communication. But the historic truth is that revealed religion *had* to declare war on science; and if to-day the war waged by religion is less honest and less courageous than it once was, this is because an open repudiation of science is no longer profitable. The emphasis has to be placed on the inadequacy of science; its inability to answer every question that any fool cares to put, and solve every conundrum that may be concocted. The godite, who will accept the most fantastic, the most outrageous, the most absurd religious stories without the slightest evidence, demands the most conclusive demonstration before he will accept a statement in the name of science—even when it is offered merely as a working hypothesis. In so acting men in the highest position in the Churches appear to believe they are proceeding with wisdom and caution. They are not, they are exhibiting that cunning and intellectual dishonesty which is a marked characteristic of Christian apologetics.

* * *

A Defence of Religion

Apropos of the meeting of the British Association (an annual occasion for an exhibition of that mixture of stupidity and dishonesty already described) an article by Mr. A. W. Haslett is given the place of honour in the *Morning Post* for September 1. Mr. Haslett aims at showing that (1) Science does not know everything, (2) that it really knows very little, and about Reality and Religion it knows nothing at all. (3) there is no ultimate truth to be found in science. Here is proposition number one:—

How much, at bottom, can science tell us of the world we live in?

And here is the answer—by Mr. Haslett:—

Science can tell us an indefinite amount about how things behave, little or nothing, in the last resort, about what things are.

I like this way of putting the matter. It sounds so profound, it means so little. It carries to so many the vision of heads heavily-laden with knowledge, but to the more discerning the picture is that of peas rattling in a bladder. Suppose science can tell us very little about the world, is there anyone or anything that can tell us more? At any rate all we do know about the world has been taught us by science, and when that fails us, to whom or to what are we to

look for more and better knowledge? To the Archbishop of Canterbury? The Bishop of London? General Booth? The Bible? Mr. Haslett is too much in the air. The bladder has become a toy balloon. The day has gone by when religious leaders could successfully pretend to have sources of information not open to ordinary people. That claim masks imposture. Religious leaders may know all that God knows, but God only knows what it is that religious leaders know. There is only one way of knowing, and that way is open to all. And there is only one way of testing the value and reliability of the knowledge we acquire, and that is by the way of science. And where science stops all must stop. The ignorance of science, temporary or permanent, is the ignorance, temporary or permanent, of all mankind. I cannot say whether Mr. Haslett knows this or not. I am certain that everyone with common sense realizes it.

* * *

Fooling with Words

Mr. Haslett complains that all science knows about things is the way they behave, therefore we do not know anything about things. The first statement is correct; the second is nonsense. In science the "behaviour" of a thing is what it does, and behaviour as used in this connection is the appearance of a thing, its actions and reactions. An apple, for example, means a combination of shape, colour, taste, and so, if this combination were not present, the object would not be an apple. But an apple does not mean a separate thing in which colour, taste, shape, perfume, etc., are stuck, as Huxley said, like tickets in a cheese. For us the combination of qualities is the object before us; give it other qualities and it is a different object. When, therefore, science tells us how a thing behaves, it is telling us, not merely all that is of use to us, it is also telling us all there is to know. The "behaviour" of a thing (using the word in a strictly scientific sense) is the thing. And if there were something else, it would not be the same thing. An apple which did not behave as the apple we know behaves would not be an apple at all. I hope Mr. Haslett will not find this too profound. I can assure him that its profundity lies in its absolute simplicity. And the man who cannot grasp it should give up such questions and confine himself to crossword puzzles.

What I have said about things being a cluster of "behaviours," applies with equal strength to "reality." This is a form of magical dope which modern religionists take very freely themselves, and dole out generously to others. But what does it mean? There are the things we know. Apparently they do not constitute "reality"; they are not real. Well, what is real? It must be something we do not know. More, it must be something we never can know, because so soon as we know it, it must "behave," and when it behaves, Mr. Haslett says it is telling us nothing at all about what it really is, because "Science is helpless to explain the nature of reality." We must then for ultimate knowledge, fall back upon the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London, and General Booth. They are greater than science. Their knowledge goes deeper than science. We know nothing that is real apart from their disclosures. The men and women we know, the things we see and feel and hear are not real and never can be real. We are not surprised that those who can swallow this sort of stuff in the name of philosophy can swallow anything in the name of religion.

A journalistic friend of mine once described the *Morning Post* as one of the best edited newspapers in the country, written for the benefit of the most hopelessly ignorant people in Britain.

What of Religion?

But the most curious complaint that Mr. Haslett brings against science is the tail-end of his article. He says:—

The obvious corollary is that science can tell the world a great deal less about religion than is generally supposed. . . . If we want reassurance as to the purpose of man, we can only turn to religion—or ourselves.

I am not quite certain as to what is meant in saying that it is only by turning from science to "ourselves," we can understand religion, unless it is a latter-day version of the Indian practice of sitting in all solemnity, contemplating one's navel, in order to reach the truth about "reality." But the statement that science can tell us little about religion, is distinctly untrue. It is science that in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and psychology has told us everything about religion that is worth the knowing. What would the world have known of the origin of the belief in gods, or a soul, or a future life, but for science? But for science we should have been still whipping lunatics to drive the devils out of them; still burning old women for witchcraft; still expecting miracles instead of seeking the factors in an act of natural causation. The only genuine understanding of religion we possess has been given us by science. Mr. Haslett repudiates "the idea of proving the distinctive beliefs of religion either from the data of physical science or by the methods of physical science." The data of physical science, admitted, but the methods of physical science is another question. For the scientific method is the same all round, the subject matter naturally requiring different modes of operation. And it is by the scientific method—the patient collection of facts, their careful classification, and the generalizations derived from the classification, that constitutes the main features of a scientific method. The trouble is, so far as the religious world is concerned, not that science is unable to deal with religion, but that within two or three generations it has been so successful in its task that the nature of religion is plain to all who will read the record aright. Mr. Haslett is not pleading for an *understanding* of religion. He is asking that in the case of religion any attempt at understanding shall be set on one side. And, after all, there is no other plan by which religion can be kept in being.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Freethought Orators

"The feast of reason, and the flow of soul."—*Pope*.

MUCH of the success of the Freethought Movement has been due to the lecturers, both men and women. Few organizations could boast of such a galaxy of oratorical talent. From the far-off days of Charles Southwell, who was a leading figure in Freethought circles in the middle of the nineteenth century, until the present time, Freethinkers have had every reason to be proud of their representatives.

There are few, if any, records of Southwell's oratory, but he must have been a clever and resourceful speaker. Old Freethinkers, with whom I have talked, all agreed that he was very accomplished and very popular. One of his converts was Charles Watts, who afterwards made a big name for himself. George Jacob Holyoake, on the other hand, was a fluent speaker and a good debater, but he was overshadowed by the magnetic and imperious personality of Charles Bradlaugh, who was not only an orator of genius, but was also a born leader of men. Six feet

in height, massively built, with a leonine head, he could play on an audience like a musician on an organ. Whether that audience was at St. James's Hall, London, or at the Hall of Science, or at the House of Commons, made little difference. He commanded attention wherever he went:—

"With that vast bulk of chest and limb assigned
So oft to men who subjugate their kind;
So sturdy Cromwell pushed broad-shouldered on;
So burly Luther breasted Babylon;
So brawny Cleon bawled his agora down;
And large-limbed Mahomed clutched a prophet's crown."

Annie Besant stood by his side for fifteen years, and during that time she rendered enormous service to Freethought. At that period ladies were scarce on advanced platforms, and her appearance, in the full charm of her womanhood, cultured to the finger-tips, was electrical. I was young, and, perhaps, impressionable, but myself and youthful comrades felt towards her as the young Royalists felt towards Marie Antoinette. This was no mere youthful exuberance, for at Annie Besant's farewell at the old Hall of Science, London, many of the audience were actually in tears. Recalling the grim days of battle, she declared: "I have been called prostitute," and the effect on that audience was as if a lash had struck it. Although I have attended many hundreds of meetings, I have never seen one so tense as that. As the audience dispersed, men stood in groups, loth to leave, as if in the presence of a grave disaster.

Not far below Annie Besant were some lady lecturers who deserve mention. Harriet Law was an excellent speaker, and had a way all her own. Her knowledge of the Christian Bible was truly extraordinary, and she had a habit of using that knowledge with the deadliest effect. She used to lasso opponents with texts and quotations, until they were tied up and made ridiculous. She could floor the most conceited and hard-boiled believer in a few minutes. Hypatia Bonner, Bradlaugh's daughter, was a great favourite with audiences, and deserved it. Endowed with personal charm, Mrs. Thornton Smith won a notable position for herself as a speaker. But "the most modest of all the speakers," as Edith Vance once described herself, must not go unmentioned. Her real work was organization, at which she was an expert, and she only spoke in public when necessary. But her devotion to duty, even after she had been afflicted with blindness, was a thing to marvel at. As Secretary of the National Secular Society she had a very onerous and difficult position, and she filled it triumphantly. She owed much to the disinterested devotion of Kathleen Kough, a most delightful and charming lady, who brought sunshine with her into the dusty purlieus of Farringdon Street, and who graced many a platform with her presence.

In such company, it seemed almost impossible that there should be found another orator of the very first rank. But in G. W. Foote, the Freethought Movement had not only its finest writer, but its most consummate speaker. He had all the gifts, and his literary culture rounded them off into one magnificent whole. His sword was ever in his hand, but it was studded with the jewels of humour and poetry. To hear a lecture from him in his prime was not only to have an evening's pleasure, but to add materially to one's knowledge. In debate he was irresistible, and his final speeches must have been awful experiences for his opponents. Indeed, the defenders of the faith realized this, for latterly they were very shy in issuing their challenges. So popular was he with the Freethinkers that, as Ben Jonson wrote of Bacon, "the fear of every man was that he would make an end."

The contrast between Foote and Bradlaugh as speakers was not unlike that between Asquith and

Lloyd George. Bradlaugh sought to beat down Superstition by sheer force of logic and law. His speeches read like judicial utterances by the side of the brilliant, sparkling orations of Foote. A generation ago, large numbers of people had a genuine fondness for rhetoric, and Foote had few rivals in England. He dealt rhetorically with elemental emotions, and he enjoyed the fact of being an apostle of liberty. Expressing the simple feelings of men, he made a universal appeal. "Give me liberty, or give me death." That was the kind of thing; a sonorous and impassioned phrase flung out to thrill the hearts and flush the cheeks of thousands. Phrase after phrase had this special quality, grandiose and sweeping. He was at his best in the old Athenæum days, but the finest speech I ever heard him deliver was at the Ferrer Protest Meeting at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London. The platform was crowded with celebrities, among them being Hyndman, Cunningham Graham, Dr. John Clifford, and others. All of the speakers were exceptional men with large personal followings, but it was the thrilling, beautiful, resonant voice of Foote which roused that meeting to its highest note of enthusiasm. This was oratory at its topmost power; there was music in it, the trumpets sang to battle:—

"Now stirred the uproar, now the murmur stilled
And sobs or laughter answered as he willed."

Charles Watts stood in a class by himself. He had a most unusual dexterity in the combination of words. He could pour forth a perfect Niagara of modulated sentences, without the sign of a note. His most triumphant speeches were those in which he wound up debates, and marshalled his arguments for the final assault on the enemy. I always admired him as a very clever speaker, but my liking for him was increased after his return from his Canadian tours, for he used to introduce quaint anecdotes and rich Americanisms which added to his already well-deserved popularity. Endowed with exceptional dramatic gifts, had he chosen the theatre as his vocation he would have made a great name for himself. He was a tower of strength in the bad old days, when Freethought needed every man for defence against the overwhelming Armada of Superstition.

For speeches which were truly educational, one must go to J. M. Robertson. When delivered in that steady, even voice, enforced by the dignity of the presence of that great scholar, they sounded uncommonly like oratory. As a speaker of the informative class, he has never been surpassed. His speaking was the perfection of clearness. Voltaire's witty description of Denis Diderot as "Monsieur Multiform" was particularly applicable to Robertson, for no man, in or out of the Freethought Movement, possessed such encyclopædic knowledge. Carrying his weight of learning gracefully, he rendered inestimable service. For he met the superfine scholars of Orthodoxy on their own ground, and routed them. As a journalist, his work on the *National Reformer* was extraordinarily fine; whilst his editorship of his own *Free Review* showed what such a periodical ought to be.

Silver-tongued J. T. Lloyd was a worthy successor of those men, who with their eloquence had laid the deep foundations of the Freethought Movement. Saturated with his subject, Lloyd in beautifully expressed language uttered the workings of a profound and reflective mind and the treasures of a large experience. His unstudied eloquence flowed like a great river through the successive moods. Lloyd was one of the last speakers of the old school of oratory, which was more heightened and more dramatic than present-day methods. Both systems have their advantages, and

we shall not quarrel with the quieter speeches of our contemporary lecturers, provided that they convert as many of their audiences as did their predecessors.

Eras of oratory must ebb and flow, but while men differ in belief, while reforms are still called for, so long as truth and right and justice need to be brought to men's minds, there will remain a demand for the eloquence of the orator. And nowhere will it be more needed than in urging the claims of liberty. The witchery of words, powerful enough on the printed page, is still more powerful when it is reinforced by voice, glance, and gesture.

Despite all the modern methods of publicity, the tried and true methods of the lecturers are the best methods of propaganda. Nothing has ever been effectively substituted for their untiring labour, and the power of the spoken word. The lecturers have brought converts from the coal-mines of Wales, from the heather-covered hills of Scotland, from the Midland mill-towns, from the countryside of Ireland, from the labyrinths of London, and from the sea-swept shores of our island. It is a splendid record.

MIMNERMUS.

A Lesson in Reverence

"Let more of reverence in us dwell."

THE mantle of Elijah, the holy and hairy prophet, fell upon Elisha, the holy and bald prophet. Elisha was a farmer's boy, and although he was known to plough a straight furrow, and his shiny poll helped him when frightening crows, Elijah, being specially gifted, saw more in him than that. He saw Holiness. Elisha was therefore allowed a stand-ticket when Elijah was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot, and Elijah, as a final gesture, threw his holy mantle down at Elisha's feet. Elisha picked it up, wore it from that moment, and became possessed of all the attributes of Holiness. But Elisha felt a difficulty in growing hair, which had been one of Elijah's strong points. Hair was, and is to-day in some rather surprising quarters, regarded as a sign of virility, and although the mantle of Elijah had curious qualities (it divided rivers, for example, so that one could cross over dry shod), Elisha found it had its limitations. Never could it manage to produce a single hair on his noddle. It was clear that the business of prophet carried with it certain drawbacks. He could start a widow in the oil trade, the oil gushing from air. He could bring her dead son back to life. But all remained ridiculously smooth on Elisha's head.

The men of Jericho came to Elisha and complained of the quality of the water and the barrenness of the land. And Elisha put a little salt in a cruse and threw it into the water and said: From this moment onwards the water will be pure and the land fruitful. And it was so. But even whilst he was doing so the shininess of Elisha's cranium was a matter of silent comment amongst the spectators.

Elisha's strong suit was miracles. In his generation the thoughtless multitude clamoured for signs, and Elisha, being a Holy Man, saw that they got them. He made a man a leper by an incantation; he made iron swim. Once when there was death in the pot he added a little meal and there was no harm in the pot. When he met a barren Shunammite wife, whose one wish was that she should bear a child, Elisha saw that she bare a child. By the aid of the Lord, there was no miracle too large for his accomplishment. But the shininess of his head remained; not a hair could be encouraged to grow.

Baldness was a sore point in those days, and the

sensitiveness of Elisha upon the point was perhaps excusable. Being a prophet of the Lord did not mean that there was complete freedom from the little weaknesses and vanities which beset feeble humanity. Elisha would have given almost his all for the thinnest of thatches. But it was not to be. The mantle of Elijah did not run to hair.

It is necessary to understand this natural sensitiveness, otherwise Elisha's next adventure might be rather difficult to understand. He was walking from Jericho to Bethel

and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.

Remember who Elisha was. He wore the Mantle of Elijah. He was in the line of apostolic succession. He possessed the favour of Jehovah. He was plenipotentiary extraordinary. He could make grown-up men, even Kings, tremble. And here were a few youngsters who quaked not, neither did they bow, nor bend, nor grovel. They were not even impressed by his old mantle. To tell the truth, it needed a few decades in years to appreciate that mantle. To those who knew its history, it was the Sign of Sanctity, the Proof of Priestly Power, the Emblem of the Eternal Verities. To the little children it was a thing of shreds and patches; its hue was not only far from gay, but suggestive of muddiness; its odour was objectionable; it needed badly the attention of the laundry. Thus always does the physical eye see with plainness when it is minus the all-important spiritual vision to see as through a glass darkly.

So they expressed their sentiments in the manner characteristic of childhood, in crude, irreverent fashion. The mantle by itself they might have stood, but . . . accompanied by a bald head! It was plain that the Lord had sent them this treat specially for their delectation. You must not put upon a child more than it can bear. So they bawled: Go up, Bald Head.

A learned theologian, Dr. Edersheim, in his *Elisha*, has pointed out that the children were reminding the bald-headed prophet of how Elijah departed this life by "Going up" to heaven in a fiery chariot, and so took the opportunity of informing Elisha that they would be glad if he would go and do likewise. But this circus trick was evidently beyond Elisha's power or inclination. Still, he had other miracles on tap. And he knew *Blasphemy* when he heard it. If such children were allowed to live and perpetuate their kind, the mantle of Elijah might degenerate in quick time into a dishcloth. His religious duty was clear. He

turned back and looked on them.

What he saw did not move him. A few score of little children not only seeking fun, but sure they had found it; tumbling over each other in their glee, screaming in their trebles, "There's hair," and then back again and again to the old refrain

Go up, go up, thou bald head!

He saw them, and heard them, and was not amused. He was a Particularly Important Personage. He could play tricks with the Elements. He knew all about Holy Oils and Holy Incantations. He was a Holy Man, and, to a Holy Man, even a little child should bow, stand still, and trace a holy cross or holy swastika, or some such holy lines upon his or her little bosom. He was not amused; he was not deterred. So he put up a fervent prayer to the Father of Jesus:—

He turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord.

"In the name of the Lord!" The Lord! The same Lord that we are exhorted in the Prayer Book to praise in good round terms:—

Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary : praise him in the firmament of his power.

Praise him for his mighty acts : praise him according to his excellent greatness. . . .

Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord. (Psalm cl.)

An opportunity for His Excellent Greatness had arrived. The setting for one of His Mighty Acts was there. One of His Holy Men had implored him, making the correct signs, uttering the correct charms, touching the correct knobs. And

There came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.

"A harsh answer, my children. Yes, quite a harsh answer (Don't interrupt, George) according to our lights. But the Lord knows what is best. And the lesson is: Let us always be reverent. Remember the Lord chooses Holy Men, and in them he makes his Dwelling. You must not ridicule God's Holy Men. God knows what would follow. And now, to bed with you."

T. H. ELSTON.

The Wesleys' "Full Sanctification"

A DEVONSHIRE Evangelist, with ampler funds than discretion, is offering interested parties a Reprint of a hundred hymns, written by the Brothers Wesley. My copy was accompanied by a very spirited "defence" of John and Charles Wesley, and of their creed. From this I gather that this new Reprint has a propagandist inspiration.

Combats between warring Christian sects have been bloodier than educative. They have seldom avoided vituperative "personalities." It is not always easy for "outsiders" to understand "the game" in these often puzzling schismatic struggles.

This Wesley Reprint apparently aims at reviving or keeping alive some controversy which only a "hard-shell" Methodist Deacon could ever want to fight about, and which nobody at all could understand.

The controversy—or the "Great Truth"—in this case is something called "Sanctification." All Methodists, it seems, are enthusiastic believers in "Sanctification." But only the Strict, Particular and Hard-shell branches of the Denomination (and possibly not ALL OF THEM) are the only ones who believe in "Full Sanctification." In the interests of this minority (if it be a minority) this Reprint is issued. The party in power, the usurpers of office, have a nasty fate in store for them for falling short, if only by a few degrees, of Full Sanctification—sometimes called "Full Redemption."

To prove the terrible nature (or effect) of the prevalent heresy (or perhaps heresy becomes orthodoxy when very prevalent), a Dr. Steele is quoted thus, in the voluminous literature which accompanies the Reprint of Wesleys' Hymns:—

Dr. Daniel Steele, one of the greatest scholars of his age, once a professor in a Methodist University, says: "This doctrine of Entire Sanctification is generally ignored by the magnates of Methodism. But in the hearts of a goodly number of the brethren of low degree, who are not coddling their reputation in their ambition for ecclesiastical promotion, it still has a welcome dwelling-place. In respect to this fact, the question of Jesus Christ is very appropri-

ate: "How can ye believe which receive honour one of another?"

We confess that the concluding reference (in this quotation) to what Christ said, eludes us, baffles us, perplexes us, but it seems to be a weighty argument to Methodists. We are a little more enlightened when we read that:—

Mr. Wesley had been teaching the importance of this Second Blessing, or Entire Sanctification with growing clearness as light and knowledge came to him, for more than fifty years, and it was the ruling passion of his soul, even when the death-dew was on his brow.

Later on the Holy Ghost too is called in as a witness to the "Reprinter's" support of "Mr.," meaning Mr. John, Wesley. According to Hebrews x. 14-16, "the Eternal Spirit" takes the original Wesley's side. With at least Two Members of the Trinity supporting the Hard-Shell Doctrine, it would seem high time to restore it to its rightful place—wherever that may be.

It was not, however, with any hope of reaching any particular aspect of Full Sanctification that we spent or wasted time in reading this collection of Poetry and Song. Here are a hundred Hymns by the founders of the Methodist Church—some of which are not allowed to grace, honour and adorn the denominational Hymnal. We have never seen anything in the latter to excuse the Compilers' ignoring Hymns quite as banal, silly and vain as accepted Hymns by equally nonsensical authors.

Dr. Newton Flew, Principal of Wesley College, Cambridge, broadcasting for the B.B.C. recently (reported in the *Listener*, August 18, 1937) said: "The Methodist Hymn Book—especially Hymns of the Wesleys—is our Liturgy, just as the Anglican has his Book of Common Prayer." Dr. Flew gives a sample, which we commend as equally poetical, wise, and truthful as most Hymns (and Liturgies):—

"E'en now we think and speak the same
And cordially agree,
Concentred all through Jesus' name
In perfect harmony."

The comic side will be most apparent to outsiders like ourselves—as we read about Christian "cordial agreement," and "perfect harmony." But "insiders" love these banal words. Dr. Flew assures his B.B.C. audience that:—

With verses from this book ordinary men and women have expressed their newly-given faith, repelled temptation, climbed to heights of holiness, and entered heaven.

where, presumably they continue to sing these silly songs eternally.

There was no "Modernism" about these Wesleys. "Lord I believe Thy every word" is their mild way (in Hymn 17) of expressing their limitless credulity.

The Wesleys were given to exaggeration about their own vileness: "My vile affections" (Hymn 5) rings curiously in one who talked about a religion of love. "Vilest of all the sons of men" (Hymn 26) is a confession probably merely untruthfully pessimistic. Was it really a fact that

"More hard than marble is my heart
And foul with sins of deepest stain."—(Hymn 34).

or is it explained in Hymn 56? Here the authors plead guilty to association with "publicans and harlots" till they became "feeble and faint and blind and poor," stricken with "sin's incurable disease," and suffering from "foul inbred leprosy." We hope these were purely imaginary troubles, otherwise the "glorying in dissolution" referred to in Hymn 12 seems a genuine desire, not unnatural in the circum-

stances. It is difficult, however, for an outsider to understand Hymn 23, which says, "Slay me and I in Thee shall trust."

For sheer pessimism let us quote Hymn 59:—

"O that I might now decrease!
O that all I am might cease!
Let me into nothing fall."

but at least it may be taken as evidence that personal ambition was not a Wesleyan fault.

There is a queer imperativeness in some of these Hymns, amounting at times to positive impudence in addressing Omnipotence (sometimes called "Lord" by those who order him about like any "boss" addressing an abject menial). Of these we quote only a tiny fraction, like:—

Hymn 12: "Come Holy Ghost"
" 33: "Give me . . ."
" 34: "Melt this rock,"

reaching its climax perhaps in Hymn 29, where the Wesleys demand an immediate Meeting of the Heavenly Cabinet, to decide some pet scheme of one of the Brothers Wesley:—

"Father, Son, and Holy Ghost
In Council meet again"! [*"Again,"* indeed]

As in most Hymnals, there is a terrible amount of snobbish flattery of Deity. Most of us would imagine a self-respecting Deity would be irritated and annoyed by Hymnists describing a decent Deity as "Light of Lights," "Boundless Wisdom," "Fairest Among Ten Thousand Fair," "All Victorious," and ending in the bathos of Hymn 43:—

"O Great Mountain Who art Thou,
Immense Immovable . . .
My Zerubbabel. . ."

A little humour might have prevented Wesley from begging the highly praised "Source of all Truth and Honour" to "Be faithful to Thy Word." We doubt if God feels duly appreciative of Messrs. Wesley's tribute, "We have found Thee true." It is as poor a testimonial as that of the sailor who wrote in the Ship's Log, that on a certain date, "the Captain was sober to-day."

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH.

Nature Notes of a Freethinker

"Then came hot July boyling like to fire,
That all his garments he had cast away.
Upon a Lyon raging yet with ire
He boldly rode, and made him to obey:
It was the beast that whylome did forray
The Nemæan forrest, till th' Amphytrionide
Him slew, and with his hide did him array.
Behinde his back a sithe, and by his side
Under his belt he bore a sickle circling wide."

Spenser.

JULY has brought moths and many mouths to eat them. Robins and chaffinches, food being scarce through the drought, snap at them as they waver amongst the seed heads of grasses. Stag beetles have hummed through the warm evening air; a hungry blackbird tried his luck to catch one of these winged dragons, but failed. Young bats have flickered round the curtains at eleven o'clock at night. The bat, so the story goes, is an example of inhibition. When the choice came to be an animal or a bird, it could not make up its mind, and consequently had to be a part of both. A naturalist friend of mine tells how he was engaged in experiments with these creatures. In a darkened room, with many wires stretched a foot or so from the ceiling, a pair flew in and out of the obstructions without touching the wires. Bats, I am told, nurse their young; they whimper and cry like children. If one only had the leisure to find out and

observe, the results would substantiate the thought that learning is infinite.

In a wild patch I left the stately and beautiful ragwort to be a golden resting-place for bees and butterflies. In early August, the butterfly to be was a black and yellow striped caterpillar, busy at the eternal ceremony of eating where his thoughtful parent had deposited him as an egg. The Buddleia tree, with its long mauve rods of bloom, is beautified regularly with the calls of the Peacock butterfly. In the sun, on the flower, it makes a picture to remember as its wings spread out in their glory. The fleetingness of the enchanting picture creates in the memory an image to be recalled at will, and if I had a lifetime of leisure before me, a better thesis of immortality could be created than the one chiefly associated with the word.

Richard Jefferies, who is still one of the illustrious unknown, has a passage in *The Story of my Heart*, which indelibly defines the indifference of the elements towards man. His particular point of view cannot be too much emphasized as it eliminates any special preference to the forked radish; it therefore wipes out the trivial comments of those writers who tell us to look only at the beauty of Nature, and if we are mentally asleep we forget its indifference. The specific passage I have in mind has a direct bearing on the recent drought that the country has experienced, with dog days to be lived through, the earth baked hard and almost impenetrable with a pick-axe, lovely flowers wilting, fruit at a standstill, and trees seared with incessant heat. That lovely little wild flower, Heartsease, in some cool shady spot, has uncovered its beautiful face as the hot wind passes it by untouched. Birds have foraged about for water, the starling at an unusual altitude is forced to catch insects from the air; horses in the lanes and streets have told in no uncertain language that heat is no respecter of persons or quadrupeds; flowers have bloomed and departed in one day, wheat has grown golden in a week, and the very air has been charged with the breath of some fiery monster, who is snorting rage and destruction. Richard Jefferies in *The Story of My Heart*, epitomizes this much better, and he shall be allowed to remind those who still think there is some benevolent scheme for man. "In the south," he writes, "the sun is the enemy; night and coolness and rain are the friends of man. As for the sea, it offers us salt water which we cannot drink. The trees care nothing for us; the hill I visited so often in days gone by has not missed me. The sun scorches man, and will in his naked state roast him alive. The sea and the fresh water alike make no effort to uphold him if his vessel founders; he casts up his arms in vain, they come to their level over his head, filling the spot his body occupied. If he falls from a cliff the air parts; the earth beneath dashes him to pieces." For weeks, a mere student of the weather-cock could say that it was futile to pray for rain. At long last there was a banking-up in the South of gigantic steel-grey clouds, an unusual silence seemed to pervade the air, birdlife was quiet, and, to indulge in a fanciful thought, the trees seemed to be expecting something. Soon there came in the evening vivid flashes of lightning, the roll of distant thunder, and then the welcome patter of rain-drops on the poplar leaves, and the morning came to find trees, flowers and grass as though some magic painter had refreshed the entire scene with a sweep of some enormous brush. Mr. W. H. Davies, a poet for whom I have a particular regard, shall sing his little song at this point:—

THE RAIN

"I hear leaves drinking rain
I hear rich leaves on top
Giving the poor beneath
Drop after drop;
'Tis a sweet noise to hear
These green leaves drinking near.

And when the Sun comes out,
After this rain shall stop,
A wondrous light will fill
Each dark, round drop;
I hope the Sun shines bright;
'Twill be a lovely sight."

Your obedient servant, Nicholas Mere, makes a present to any friend who would like to accuse him of having a bee in his bonnet in respect of Enchantment. A reading of Nietzsche brought to light the fascinating idea of bringing good out of evil. There can be no two opinions that it is an evil thing that man has had it drummed into his head that he was born in sin and shapen in iniquity. Against this theory, which was cast out many years ago as useless cargo of the mind, once again your obedient servant puts forward his own theory of Enchantment. In a country public-house (where the writer had called to enquire the time), there was an enchanting picture which could have been painted for all time by a master. Amongst workmen who had finished their work and still bore marks of their toil on their hands and faces, a handsome Indian wearing a turban was selling silk ties to the dart players. In the light and shadow his face was the centre of his surroundings, and it occurred to me that the talk turned over in such company is no better and no worse than that found in expensive books, or even cheap books making a parade of knowledge. One sturdy man in the dart-playing company, said casually to another, that he would "put two rows of peas in," and anticipating academic criticism, I am prepared to defend the thesis that this is as important, no more and no less, than the following extract from *Theory and Art of Mysticism*, by Radhakamal Mukerjee (Longmans, 195.): "As the mystic rises on a higher plane of consciousness he frees himself more and more from the traditional categories and symbols of his particular religion until his metaphysical statement becomes of universal import and acceptance. All this means that Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism should, instead of attacking each other, coalesce and enrich the religious experience of the true mystics of each religion." To return, however, to my own theory of Enchantment, the reader may find for himself, and without worrying his mind on the subject, beautiful things on one condition—that he is prepared to look for them. The key to Enchantment came to me through a study of the pretty winged creatures called birds, and I know of no more fascinating search in this pilgrimage called Life than finding these pictures, which are free to everyone, and up to the present are not taxed by the Government. Voltaire said that the compensation for living was to say what one thought. William Blake, who was an unusual and near neighbour of Voltaire, said that if you speak your mind base men will avoid you; a compensation to the writer, who has lived in an endeavour to make the unready mind recognize the obvious, is this theory of Enchantment, and it can be examined without any question-begging of mysticism. On this note I conclude, and as I write the August halfmoon can be seen through the window across which are delicate traces of branch and leaf of a poplar tree, and this same moon is shedding its light on acres of corn the world over, but Spenser can record the month of August, and with the poet's usual defiance of logic, bring moral values to that which eventually finds its way to the bread-board:—

"The sixth was August, being rich array'd
In garment all of gold downe to the ground;
Yet rode he not, but led a lovely Mayd
Forth by the lilly hand, the which was cround
With eares of corne, and full her hand was found:
That was the righteous Virgin, which of old
Liv'd here on earth, and plenty made abound;
But after Wrong was lov'd, and Justice solde,
She left th' unrighteous world, and was to heaven extold."

NICHOLAS MERE.

For the Atheist, God is a figment, nothing: in blaspheming God he therefore blasphemes nothing. A man really blasphemes when he mocks, insults, pollutes, vilifies that which he really believes to be holy and awful. . . . Speaking philosophically, an honest Atheist can no more blaspheme God than an unmarried man can be disloyal to a King, than an unmarried man can be guilty of conjugal infidelity.—James Thomson.

Acid Drops

We remark elsewhere in this issue that the meeting of the British Association usually gives rise to a lot of nonsense concerning religion and science. A fine example was given at the meeting of the Modern Churchmen Conference at Cambridge on September 1. The speaker was Dr. Lawrence Browne, who is described as a distinguished Arabic scholar. He was dealing with miracles, and said he knew personally

a Christian convert from Islam who, at a critical moment in his life was saved from starvation by food dropped in front of him by a crow or kite.

The conclusion is, therefore, we must be careful in denying the miracle of the resurrection. One observes that this miracle, a copy of the biblical one, occurred to a *Christian convert from Islam*. It would never have happened to a convert from Christianity. Now, we do not deny that Dr. Browne might not have been told by some convert that the miracle had occurred to him. We are equally certain that if the man had not been a convert to Christianity he would at once have been set down as a liar.

Dr. Browne defines a miracle as a departure from *common* experiences. We were under the impression that a "miracle" was always concerned with the direct interposition of divine power for a particular purpose. But anything out of the common appears to fill the bill. May we suggest that a Christian speaker who takes care to speak the truth, and to describe actual and verifiable facts, comes within the category of the miraculous.

We fancy that Mr. Winston Churchill would describe himself as a Christian, and we are fairly certain that he would dilate upon the wonderful teachings of Jesus Christ. In an article in the *Evening Standard* for September 3, after describing the Chinese as possessing an ancient civilization, and as having "developed a high intelligence, and in many cases an admirable fidelity," he says that:—

If the Chinese now suffer the cruel malice and oppression of their enemies, it is the fault of the base and perverted conception of pacifism they have ingrained for two or three thousand years in their people.

Now we wonder what Mr. Churchill would do with the "base and perverted teaching" of Jesus Christ to turn one cheek when the other was smitten?

Mr. Churchill thinks that, under the impact of Japan, China may gradually develop a military spirit. That is rather too local in its survey. When the Chinese develop a military spirit it will be under impact of *Christian* countries for the past century and a quarter. Just as Christian treatment forced large numbers of Jews into finance, through laws that prevented their safely following other occupations, and because money was the one thing before which Christians were ready to bow, so the raping of China by one Christian power after another, taught the Chinese that brute force was the ultimate thing before which the Christian World would pause. Japan was a late arrival in the field, and even Japan had to come to Christendom for lessons in the art of scientific slaughter. But one cannot expect Mr. Churchill to consider such things as these.

General Franco writes Mussolini thanking him for the valuable services of the Italian forces in Spain in fighting the Government of the country. Mussolini publicly thanks the generals commanding the Italian soldiers in Spain for the way they have upheld the glory of the Italian army and air-force in Spain. The Italian Government also publishes a list of nearly 2,000 Italian soldiers killed. Only Mr. Eden, Mr. Chamberlain, the *Daily Mail*, and the military correspondent of the *Observer* appear to be ignorant of there being in Spain more than a negligible number of Italians fighting with Franco. Certainly there are not enough to lead anyone to assume that Mussolini has broken the non-intervention compact.

The *Daily Express*, which hardly ever fails to exploit the grossest forms of superstition existing, such as the number of people who die as a consequence of opening an Egyptian tomb, publishes another case of an Irish Sweep winner, who was killed through winning a big prize. We were very much impressed by the *Express* heading "Won £16,750 for 10s., but it killed him," and we intend doing what we can to avoid such disasters. So we hereby undertake, without any other consideration whatever, to take from any winner in the Irish Sweepstake, any prize or prizes he may win. We appreciate the risk, but the *Freethinker* exists to do what it can to help others. The *Express* merely states the case of people who are killed through winning a prize. We are out to help them.

Bishop Walter Carey considers "irreligion" as quite "irrational." In its place he puts this sort of thing:—

The eternal things; what are they? God the Creator, the Ultimate Source of all; Christ the Redeemer of sinful man; the Holy Spirit, the giver of life and strength; God's character of goodness, truth, love, beauty, which we must open ourselves to and assimilate; prayer as the source of power—perhaps the only ultimate source of human power for good; worship, as the expression of man's awe and reverence for God, worship which culminates in our identification with Christ and His worship and sacrifice and self-giving.

This unmeaning rigmarole of theology is claimed to be quite "rational," and the Bishop also "takes it for granted that a person who neglects his soul is as big a fool as a person who neglects his body or mind." And in case you are still unconvinced, the Bishop gives this intelligent advice to a "noble but despondent priest"—"He and the rest of us in the Church must pray our people into religion." Foolish as Bishop Carey may be, we can hardly believe that even he thinks that "praying" for us will ever bring back a single unbeliever. If he does, then downright stupidity could hardly go further—to say nothing of "irrationality." And what kind of triumph is it to *win back* those who are already impressed by goodness, truth, love and beauty, but who do *not* acknowledge these to be parts of "God's character?"

The Bishop of Worcester wants £72,000 "for Church work in new districts and for Church schools." He thinks it of "enormous importance" to raise this sum. And to prove it is always more or less easy to get money for religion, he said he had already received £10,000 and a promise for two similar sums. Slums, poverty, hunger and misery would in all probability have evoked no response from the generous donors but *religion*—that is a different story. Bodies may die but souls *must* be saved.

Dr. Herbert H. Farmer, in the *Christian World*, posits what he calls "The Dilemma of Godlessness." The "dilemma" is entirely in the mind of the believer—it has no other existence. It is the foolish fallacy that either human life is eternal, or "man becomes a rather pathetic animal." No Freethinker believes that human life is insignificant, as Dr. Farmer imagines the sceptic thinks. On the other hand, we confidently accuse Christians of doing their best to undermine men's belief in human life—the only human life which demonstrably exists. "Otherworldliness," as George Eliot pointed out, stands in the way of amelioration of this world's evils. The real dilemma is that which asks, Why waste time in patching up the things of this passing world when another and better one which will never pass away can be had if we devote all our attention to its superior claims?

Only the sex-obsessed mind of a cleric could have arrived at the conclusion that Shakespeare's play "Measure for Measure" is "disfigured by the persistent and exaggerated employment of the sex motive,"—which is the "criticism" attributed to Canon Scott-Moncrieff, vicar of Buxton, on Miss Lilian Baylis's production of the play at the local festival. "The same disfigurement appears in the Old Testament, and most of the works of

St. Paul," retorts Miss Baylis, unduly honouring the vicar by her notice. We do not think this lady who has done the public such fine service at the Old Vic and Sadlers Wells—a service beyond all the Church has rendered in the whole course of its existence—will pause before further producing "Romeo and Juliet," because some parsons may look upon Balcony scenes unfavourably. Our suspicions are strong that the vicar of Buxton found "Measure for Measure" strike too deeply home. Angelo's cogitations have a distinctly religious flavour.

Now that Mr. Herbert's Divorce Bill has become law, the Bishops who opposed it have been airing their views in justification of their opposition. The Bishop of Ely, for example, declared, the other day, that easy divorce is "retrograde and anti-social in character and effect." He quotes Theodore Roosevelt as saying: "Easy divorce is the bane of any nation. It is a curse to society, and a menace to the home, an incitement to married unhappiness, an evil thing to men, and a still more hideous evil to women." One would have thought that anything said by this Roosevelt was not a particularly good recommendation. It will take a long time for people with scruples to forget that Theodore characterized Thomas Paine as a "dirty little Athiest"—three lies in three words, for, of course, Paine was neither dirty, nor little, nor an Atheist.

The Bishop of Chelmsford regards the passing into law of the Bill "with great regret and grave apprehension for the future." He criticizes it very severely in his *Diocesan Chronicle*, the burden of his cry being that the Bill is absolutely "un-Christian" in character—which seems to us, as well as to many people, rather in its favour. It is as well to put on record that most of our Bishops violently opposed Divorce Reform, as indeed they have mostly opposed all reforms in the past. The time is bound to come when easier divorce will be considered, not only as quite Christian, and advocated by "Our Lord"—rightly understood, of course—but to have been the result of our superior Christian environment. Is not that the case with Slavery, for example?

A number of Catholics, including Jesuits, will take part in the proceedings of the British Association in September at Nottingham. One of them, Fr. Gill, S.J., of Dublin, will preach in St. Barrabas' Cathedral on "God's Place in Science." A much more appropriate subject would have been, "Has God any Place in Science?" or "Is any God necessary for Science?" It is a pity that courtesy will prevent some of our scientists from publicly asserting what they think of such sermons.

Fifty Years Ago

So far from the world being indebted to Christianity for hospitals, they were not found among Christians until the fourth century; and Saint Chrysostom, who did much towards instituting them, was very badly treated by his fellow Christians. Hospitals for the insane were first found among the Mohammedans. They afterwards spread among Christian countries, the earliest being found in Spain, the country most influenced by Mohammedan institutions; while in Europe insane persons were, by command of Papal bulls, burnt and tortured as witches and agents of Satan. At Bagdad was the House of Mercy, in which all mad people were confined. They were carefully examined every month, and released as soon as they recovered. During the long period when Christianity was triumphant knowledge of the medical art was tabooed as unholy. The care of the body, in any scientific sense, was left to Mohammedan and Jewish physicians. Hospitals for the insane were not known even in Spain before the fifteenth century, and there was no foundling hospital in Rome before the thirteenth century. The Christian contention that Christianity, and Christianity alone, has shown care for human life and human suffering will no more bear examination than any other of its myriad false pretensions.

The Freethinker, September 11, 1887

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

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TO CORRESPONDENTS.

REGARDING Education films, if Mr. Cordwell writes Mr. M. Feldman, 58 Meanwood Road, Leeds, he may receive helpful information.

J. BARTON.—Thanks for cutting.

W. WILLIAMS (Auckland, N.Z.)—Thanks for useful cutting.

A. F. BULLOCK.—We share your appreciation of the article "God's Mercy."

T. E. MONKS, H. BLACK, H. BAYFORD AND G. WALLACE.—Thanks for good wishes, we know they are thorough. Will try and deserve some of the things you say.

G. G. KNOWLES.—Pleased to hear from you. It is difficult to advise on reading, unless one knows what the person asking wants or needs. But you might dig into *The Meaning of Meaning*, by Ogden and Richards (12s. 6d.) and *Human Ecology*, by J. W. Bews (15s.). The trouble with books nowadays is the price at which they are published. And the profit does not appear to go to the authors.

R. THOMAS.—Thanks. We cannot say when Mr. Cohen will be again lecturing in Edinburgh.

A. CARPENTER.—Letter will appear next week.

H. WRIGHT.—Thanks; shall appear.

T. BERTLEY.—Thanks for portrait. It recalls very many pleasant hours of the long past. We are glad to see that your enthusiasm for the great cause is as lively as ever.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums

Mr. Cohen has been in receipt of many congratulations, and much praise, chiefly for doing something that he has achieved without making any effort whatever. He has managed to achieve the 69th anniversary of his birth-date. There are very many who have beaten him in this matter, but as so many have sent their congratulations and good wishes, with hopes that he will "keep on doing it," he can but return hearty thanks and every appreciation. No man is the worse for feeling that he has established points of contact with so many men and women, some unknown, and likely to remain so. Will all those who have written please take this as an acknowledgement of thanks for their very kind expressions of regard.

I was almost repeating the old saw that old age has its compensations, as though it needed some sort of apology. There are, of course, many lives that call for compensation, lives that are blasted from the outset, and which from childhood to the grave are records of suffering and ill-doing that are direct consequence of their heredity and their environment. These lives deserve compensa-

tion, if such a thing were possible. But nothing in this life or in any other conceivable one can ever give it. A wrong done is done for ever; it persists in its consequences in this life, and it is stupid selfishness to imagine that it can be made good in any other. A man's nose once pulled cannot be un-pulled. The doctrine of post-mortem rewards and punishment has been a profitable one for the Christian Church. It has made the slave content to wear his chains; it has helped to make the oppressed satisfied under their oppression. It has provided an easy road to heaven for scoundrels, and has filled the coffers of the Church as nothing else could have done. But the religious teaching of compensation is fundamentally false. We can cease to make people suffer unnecessarily, and we can do something towards lightening the natural burdens of others, but we cannot "compensate" anyone for wrongs done. Society at best can only organize itself so that each shall suffer as little as possible from the undeserved hardships of existence.

So I do not agree that old age calls for "compensation." On the contrary, it gives something that earlier periods cannot give, just as earlier periods give what cannot be experienced in old age. The years bring with them their own benefits, as each season carries its own peculiar beauty. The infants' world is bounded by the mother's breast, the child lives in its own world of fantasy, the young man and young woman pass their years in a dream of romance and with all the thrill of a great adventure. And the old with a lifetime of much that is great in art, in literature, and in experience, can look back and re-live all that experience suggests, and may to the end give their contribution to the life around them. Old age does not give compensation. It is not, of necessity, a state of beggary dependent upon the charity of others. It is more like one living royally on investments made with wisdom, and on which a rich dividend comes with unflinching regularity. Most of us can achieve old age, not all of us manage to make that investment in our youth that will supply us with good dividends when we get old.

One of my correspondents writes that he almost sent me a birthday sonnet. If he had done so I might have been tempted to reply with another, and that would have served him right, due disregard being paid to the feelings of other *Freethinker* readers. But of the public utterances, readers may be interested in the following from the New York *Truth Seeker*, our only senior in the world of Freethought journals:—

Every week the postman comes up the path with a copy of the London *Freethinker*, by courtesy of the Editor, Chapman Cohen, who is the unflinching source of a commanding article on the front page. The *Freethinker* has been fortunate in its editors. In the time of Mr. Cohen's predecessor, George William Foote, I made the guess—no one dissenting—that Mr. Foote as a writer, had not his superior anywhere. He was doing Great Britain's best writing; and as I read Mr. Cohen, I am persuaded he is doing the same.

All I can say in self-defence is that I have never aimed at more than saying what I had to say as simply and as clearly as I possibly could.

The *Literary Guide* for September has the following:—

On September 1, Mr. Chapman Cohen enters upon his seventieth year. Only the inner circle know the full extent of his wonderful energy as editor, lecturer, and organizer. Each week he writes probably four or five pages for the *Freethinker* (alone a formidable undertaking), and in addition he not only frequently lectures, but has each day to attend to a heavy correspondence. When Mr. Cohen has completed another ten or twenty years' service in the cause of militant Freethought it will not be easy to find a successor to carry on the work to which he has disinterestedly devoted his life.

We appreciate the cordial sentiments of our British and American contemporaries as fellow workers in the greatest of causes. The present editor of the *Truth Seeker* is a very much younger man than ourselves, but he is a born fighter, and we are glad to know that under

his guidance the oldest Freethought paper in the world, appears to be making a deserved advance. We hope he will get the support he deserves from American Freethinkers. The editor of the *Literary Guide*, while our senior by about ten years, has done worthy work in the creation of the Rationalist Press, with its wide distribution of Freethinking books. Although confined to his home, his interest in the work is, we have reason to know, what it ever was. He will have much on which to congratulate himself as he looks back upon the years that have gone.

And now once again my very hearty thanks to the many who have written me so warmly, and so appreciatively of what I have been able to do in the past forty-eight years of public work for Freethought. If I deserve a tithe of the praise these letters contain, I am well repaid. I do not print these letters, and for a sufficient reason. I edit the *Freethinker*, and in the circumstances those who have written me must take these notes as sufficient. As it is I am rather ashamed of the space occupied. But not to have made some public acknowledgment would have appeared as scurvy treatment to as staunch a band of friends as a man ever had. I hope I shall continue to deserve their confidence to the end. And after—?

A new edition of the ever-green *Bible Handbook*, by G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball is in the press, and will be published at an early date. There are a number of orders for the new edition to hand, and copies will be sent as soon as the book is out of the printer's and binder's hands. The price, as before, will be 2s. 6d., cloth bound, postage 2½d.

Some members of the West Ham Branch N.S.S. are interested in forming, with others, an international film society. The objects are, to produce films of educational Freethought character, to obtain records of work done by the N.S.S., and to obtain films from foreign countries dealing with local, social and cultural conditions. Those interested in the project should write to Mr. G. R. Cordwell, 31 Goldsmith Road, Leyton, E.10.

The Leeds Branch N.S.S. will have the services of Mr. G. Whitehead for the week commencing to-day (September 12) and lectures will be held each evening. There are some enthusiastic workers in the Branch who will see that full advantage is obtained from the meetings for the further strengthening of the movement in Leeds. The support of unattached saints is asked for and will be appreciated.

The Rev. Oscar Stanway, Vicar of Claygate, Surrey, declares that pulpit-bleating and gabbling are turning hundreds of people from the Church. In his Church Magazine he makes an appeal to ministers:—

Be natural! The parsonic voice—that monotonous throaty bleat—has ruined beautiful services. It is dreary, wearisome, depressing, quite unnatural.

It has up to now been considered quite appropriate that the unnatural voice should be used in the service of the supernatural. But other times, other manners. And those *empty pews!*

A newspaper item from Perth, Western Australia, tells of a recent happening in the Forest River district. A native rainmaker, named Elijah is held in awe by his fellow natives. Early in June rain was badly needed. Elijah therefore rubbed two stones together and solemnly commanded a clear sky to bring forth rain. When he finished his ceremony a cloud appeared. For two days the clouds increased until the whole district was overcast, but no rain came. After a week of waiting Elijah explained that an evil spirit had stolen the rain. So he repeated his ceremonies and rain came—a phenomenal occurrence, states the press message, for this time in the distant north. Elijah was a true prophet. To prophesy rain is a sure thing in the absence of a time clause.

Some Bible Worthies

THE Bible cannot be said to be a humorous book; but occasionally there issues through the dim religious gloom a sound resembling that of laughter in the distance, and reminding one of the mournful notes of a muffled drum. One of these rare occasions was when the angel of the Lord appeared to Sarah, Abram's wife, who was childless, and told her that in due course she would have a son. She was long past the child-bearing age, and had given up all hope of ever presenting Abram with an heir. So thinking that the angel of the Lord was joking, or trying to pull her leg, as we say, she laughed. Now, if there is anything an angel of the Lord cannot stand, it is to hear people laugh; it is so utterly contrary to his notions of the cosmic arrangement of things. So off he went to see Abram, and said: Wherefore did Sarah laugh? To which Abram replied: She is of age, ask her. Am I a woman that I should understand all the whimsicalities of the female tribe? Not satisfied, the angel returned again to Sarah, but Sarah denied it, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay, but thou didst laugh. After he had disappeared, to rain down fire and brimstone upon the hapless cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Sarah sat down, and this time had a hearty laugh. Sarah will always be known as the woman who laughed! The popular descriptions of heaven are a reflex of the religious temperament created by the sombre gloom of the Bible; for while there is plenty of psalm-singing and wing-flapping in that eternal home, there is no laughter.

The story of Adam and Eve, in its simplicity and idyllic charm, appeals more to the ideals of the Western mind than the polygamous careers of those later patriarchs, who appear to have been such favourites with God. Those happy days spent in the Garden of Eden must have been a pleasant memory to the faithful couple in their later years. One can imagine Adam the gardener, carefully tending the gooseberries and the cabbages, while Eve, in an easy chair under the shade of a mulberry tree, sat mending his pants. The novelty and the joy of the situation must have been a constant source of wonder and delight, and a perennial topic of conversation. For they had learned the art of speech, in the same way that the lion had learned to roar, the bull to bellow, and the birds to sing. The monogamic faithfulness of Adam is in striking contrast to the lascivious, matrimonial exploits of the Jacobs and the Solomons in the later centuries. Eve may not have been the woman of his "choice," but she was a creation who fulfilled all the legitimate desires and ideals of his nature. When God put him into a deep sleep, and out of one of his ribs formed and presented to him such a fair specimen of virginal loveliness, Adam, if he had been so minded, might have suggested to God to take all his other ribs, and make some more beauties like her, in order that he could have a harem. But no, Eve was his first and only love; for although he lived to be 930 years of age, there is no record that he ever insulted her memory by taking to himself another wife. And if mankind had paid less heed to the promptings of the Devil, and followed more closely the ideal example of Adam, the lawyers in the divorce courts of to-day would be having a lean time. Instead of the party shibboleths of "Back to the land," and "Back to Religion," what mankind needs most of all to solve its economic and social difficulties, is to get "Back to Adam."

Another worthy of note is the sea-faring captain, called Noah. Long ages before the maritime adventures of the ancient Phœnicians, this patriarch

had navigated his barque, or Ark, through troublous and unchartered seas, and brought her safely into port. His curious and strangely assorted cargo has been the wonder of the ages. Even to-day, no child's nursery is complete without its "Noah's Ark." But his multifarious cargo had caused him a lot of trouble, and he was glad to leave the sea for good, and settle down on dry land. So he began a fresh career as a husbandman, and planted a vineyard. But the cultivation of the vine was his undoing. He had been misled by Omar Khayyam's fulsome praises of the noxious juice: and he "drank of the juice, and was drunken," and lay within his tent in a shockingly inebriated condition, the loose state of his apparel testifying to his helplessness. His son, Ham, saw the nakedness of his father, and went and told his two brethren without:—

And Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father, and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.

But their precautions were of no avail, because a policeman had spied him inside the tent door, and nabbed him. He was brought to the court on a charge of drunkenness and indecency, and fined seven shillings and sixpence with costs. The magistrate said he regarded the case as a very serious one, and advised him not to read such pernicious literature as Omar Khayyam, and to keep off the drink. Also, he warned him to see that in future his clothing needed more care. No citizen, he said, ought to get so helplessly drunk. But seeing that the accused had lived six hundred years, and this was his first offence, he had taken a lenient view of the case, and only imposed a small fine. But Noah had learned his lesson, and he strongly urged Shem, Ham and Japheth, to sign the pledge. He himself, although he lived to the age of 950 years, never afterwards allowed anything stronger to pass his lips than a weak concoction of lemon and barley water.

The book of Ruth is a pretty, pastoral story, introducing a welcome change with an interesting human note, amid all the sordid details of never-ending sacrificial slaughter, and the extraordinary whims of the God Jahweh. It tells of an Israelite, who, with his wife and two sons, migrated to the land of Moab, at a time when there was a famine in Canaan. From time immemorial there had been famines in Canaan; although strange to say, the Egyptians who worshipped heathen gods, always had their granaries stocked full of corn. This time, these famine-stricken Israelites made a journey to the land of Moab, whose inhabitants also worshipped false gods, but who had plenty of corn. They seemed to have stayed a long time, as, by and by, we read that the husband died, and also the two sons, both of whom had taken Moabitish wives. Naomi, the man's widow, wished to return to Canaan, of which she had heard a favourable report; and Ruth, despite the pleadings of her mother-in-law to stay with her own people, elected to go with her. They arrived in Bethlehem—Judah at the beginning of the harvest. All Naomi's relatives were busy in the harvest field, and one of them, a wealthy farmer, named Boaz, allowed Ruth to follow among the gleaners in the stubble.

Now, according to an old Jewish law, well known to Naomi, and which she explained to her daughter-in-law, Ruth had some marital claim upon this Boaz, as being a near kinsman. And one night, when he was in the threshing-floor winnowing the wheat, after he had had his supper, and, like Noah, had drunk more wine than was good for him, he went to lie down at

the end of the heap of corn, and was soon fast asleep. Ruth, at the instigation of her mother-in-law, then appeared at the door of the threshing-floor. "She came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down." Boaz, however, must have been in as deep a sleep as Adam after he had inhaled the chloroform, because tickle the soles of his feet as she might, Ruth could get no response. Mrs. Grundy, of course, would not approve of such a seemingly wanton act, but we can assure her, on the authority of Holy Writ, that when she slipped quietly out of the threshing-floor in the early dawn, Ruth was as innocent as when she entered it in the darkening twilight of the previous evening. However, Boaz was a righteous man, and a stickler for the proprieties, so the story ends with the ringing of the wedding-bells—and the information that the son who was born of the marriage was the grandfather of King David; which seems to be the only reason for the inclusion of this story among the books of the Bible.

The moral delinquencies of this same David were bad enough, but they might have been worse, if it had not been for the infiltration of Moabite blood into his veins. It is curious to reflect that two of the most interesting female characters in the Bible—Ruth the Moabite, and the Queen of Sheba—were heathen idolators, and did not belong to God's chosen people. The reply of Ruth, when Naomi entreated her to remain with her own people, is one of the gems that has enriched Hebrew literature:—

Entreat me not to leave thee, or return from following thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried.

Such an expression of fidelity reads more like an extract from one of the pagan classics, and is as unlike any recorded Hebrew sentiment as chalk is from cheese. She was willing even to forsake her gods, if such an act enabled her to perform a more important filial duty.

JOSEPH BRYCE.

Thomas Paine: An Investigation

[The following essay on Paine was published in 1888. It has for a long time been out of print. Recent discussions on Paine justify its re-appearance.]

(Continued from page 566)

WHEN Mr. Stephen observes that Paine's "ignorance was vast"—a phrase which might loosely be used of any man—we are forced to assume that he has in view some of the matters on which he himself expressly comments, as this:—

He [Paine] explains . . . that his chronology is taken from the dates printed on the margins of the "larger Bibles," which he apparently supposes to be part of the original documents (i. 459).

I am here once more in a difficulty as to the proper way of answering Mr. Stephen. The plain truth is that this is a scandalous perversion of the plain fact. So far from there being the slightest reason for believing that Paine made the incredible blunder here wantonly charged on him, the passage itself shows that he did no such thing. It runs thus:—

The chronology that I shall use is the Bible chronology for I mean not to go out of the Bible for evidence of anything, but to make the Bible itself prove historically and chronologically that Moses is not the author of the books ascribed to him. It is therefore proper that I inform the reader (such an one at

least as may not have opportunity of knowing it) that in the larger Bibles, and also in some smaller ones, there is a series of chronology printed in the margin of every page, for the purpose of showing how long the historical matters stated in each page *happened, or are supposed to have happened, before Christ*, and consequently the distance of time between one historical circumstance and another.

Will Mr. Stephen next tell us that Paine, in the very act of analysing the biblical books with a view to questions of authorship, held that a pre-Christian scribe wrote in his margin the year B.C. in which the events he narrated were "supposed to have happened"? I doubt whether wilful dishonesty could reach worse results in the way of false witness than Mr. Stephen contrives to get to through mere carelessness and prejudice.

Take next the derisive passage following:—

Wishing to prove that much of [the Bible] is so poetical that even the translation retains "the air and style of poetry," and remembering that some of his readers may consider that poetry means rhyming, he [Paine] adds to a verse from Isaiah a line of his own composition" (i. 459).

Let me remind the reader that in the passage in question is a footnote, which Paine begins thus: "As there are many readers who do not see that composition is poetry unless it be in rhyme, it is for their information that I add this note." That is to say, the footnote is expressly added for the benefit of uncultured readers. Is this a proof either of gross ignorance or of fatuity? If Lord Selborne teaches a Bible class, does this prove him unfit to hold the Chancellorship? I am not arguing that Paine was a scholar. On the contrary, we know that he read comparatively little, his power lying in his original faculty of thought and speech. But I observe that it matters nothing to Mr. Stephen whether Paine were well-informed or not: either way he will contrive to belittle him. Take as illustration the following sentences:—

The most remarkable argument in the second part [of the *Age of Reason*] is a collection of the various passages which, if occurring in the original, show that the so-called books of Moses cannot have been composed by Moses or his contemporaries. . . . *The remarks are creditable to Paine's shrewdness.* The same difficulties had been suggested long before by Spinoza and by Newton; but those writers were apparently beyond the range of his reading (i. 461).

Anybody but Mr. Stephen, I think, would have admitted that if Paine detected for himself, without any help, a number of the proofs that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch, he would have given proof of great critical acuteness. Mr. Stephen believes he did so discover them, but will only concede that the discovery showed "shrewdness"; just as elsewhere he follows the impudently absurd academic usage of making out good reasoning to be unworthy of respectful comment when it is arrived at by "mother-wit." Thus can a learned historian arrive at the sage decision that a man's reasoning "loses little by not being smothered." Judicious concession! With Mr. Stephen, it is rather better to be obtuse with culture than clear-headed without it. But in the passage before us he contrives to err in his facts in one direction as well as to pervert justice in another. Paine *did* know something of Spinoza's criticism of the Bible. In the second part of the *Age of Reason*, the very section to which Mr. Stephen alludes, he states that he has "seen the opinion of two Hebrew commentators, Abenezra and Spinoza," on the subject of the authorship of the book of Job. It is indeed a small matter, compared with the others, that Mr. Stephen should assume Paine to

have had no help from Spinoza, since in any case it is certain he had not much; but it is interesting to have this further light on Mr. Stephen's way of going to work. It now appears that he had not thought it worth while to do more than glance into the book he was criticizing.

Take yet another of his imputations:—

The *Age of Reason* indeed sometimes amuses by the author's impudent avowals of ignorance. In the last part, he mentions a few authorities, and appears to have been dabbling in some inquiries as to the origin of the Jewish and Christian faiths. This, however, was an afterthought. In the first part he avows, with some ostentation, that he has not even a copy of the Bible. Quoting Addison's paraphrase of the nineteenth psalm, he adds, "I recollect not the prose, and when I write this I have not the opportunity of seeing it." Before the publication of the second part, he had "furnished himself with a Bible and a Testament," and found them to be "much worse books than he had conceived." (i. 458-9).

Again, what are the facts? The first part of the *Age of Reason* was written by Paine in Paris while in hourly expectation of arrest and consequent death; it being his earnest wish to leave behind him a protest against the irrationality of the popular religion. The manuscript was only finished a few hours before the arrest came. English or other Bibles were not likely to be very abundant in Paris at that time, and Paine expressly states in the First Part that he "had not the opportunity of seeing one," and again in the preface to the Second Part that he "could not procure any." To call this an impudent avowal of ignorance is just to add one more to Mr. Stephen's sins against literary good morals. Paine knew the Bible in general extremely well: he had been brought up on it, and he had an excellent memory; only it required the later perusal with an emancipated mind to see all its flaws. In any case, the First Part of the *Age of Reason* is a general argument such as any thinker might fitly write in his study without specially consulting the Bible at all. It attacked central principles and not details. And the fact remains, as Paine was entitled to boast, that he had "produced a work that no Bible believer, though writing at his ease, with a library of Church books about him, can refute"; whatever Mr. Stephen may choose to suggest by the safe process of insinuation. One would have thought that a book of such earnestness and force, written under such circumstances, would extort from any critic of repute an admission of the writer's elevation of mind: that the man who wrote such a treatise while in hourly expectation of death on the scaffold would receive at least credit for courage and magnanimity. But no: all that Mr. Stephen can discover is an "impudent avowal of ignorance."

Mr. Stephen's language implies, if words mean anything, that Paine's arguments were weighty mainly as against those who believed in the literal inspiration of the English version of the Scriptures. A criticism so egregiously wide of the mark is really not worth detailed refutation; but as so often happens with him, Mr. Stephen himself supplies the answer. Paine's arguments, deduced from a "hasty" reading of the Bible, while mainly adapted to the most ignorant believers, yet have their defects largely atoned for by "keen mother-wit," and "moreover" often "hit real blots." It is inimitable, this blowing hot and cold in the same breath: I know no rival to Mr. Stephen in the art. But the triumph of his method is attained only in this sentence:—

Paine's book announced a startling fact, against which all the flimsy collection of conclusive proofs were powerless. It amounted to a proclamation that the creed no longer satisfied the instincts of

rough common sense any more than the intellects of cultivated scholars (i. 463).

Here the historian's exquisitely balanced mind contrives to imply at once that the orthodox answers to Paine were one and all flimsy, and yet that Paine's being right was no great proof of his being a competent thinker. It was only "rough common-sense"!

Need I here state that the implication as to the "cultivated scholars" having generally seen the truth before Paine is not true? The general effect of Mr. Stephen's own book is to show that there were cultivated scholars in abundance who could not see what Paine perceived by his deplorably unvarnished common sense. The critic's favourite, Burke, could not see it, remaining a blind and unreasoning believer; the scholarly Horsley had just been showing, in the scholarly Horsley had just been showing, in controversy with Priestley, that scholarship could very well be on the side of irrational faith.

When all is said Mr. Stephen is obliged to admit of Paine's *Age of Reason*—and I fear the avowal must have cost him discomfort—that the book made powerfully for righteousness as well as for right reason. In a passage considerably earlier than the detailed notice of the book, he had observed that "Wesley from one side, and Tom Paine from another, forced more serious thoughts upon the age" (i. 273)—this after "the attack and defence" of previous writers had "lowered the general tone of religious feeling," and generally furthered intellectual stagnation. And the admission is once more made later on. Mr. Stephen is a critic not devoid of conscientiousness; and when he really feels a truth he does not hesitate to state it. But his idiosyncrasies will not let him reduce his criticism in order even by a methodical balancing of pros and cons: he must needs leave only a distracted series of contradictions. This is the note of his criticism in general, but least of all could he contrive to produce a clear generalization as to Paine:—

Paine, indeed, deserved moral reprobation for his brutality; and his book has in it an unpleasant flavour. Yet there was a fact which the respectable public tried hard to ignore. Paine's appeal was *not simply* to licentious hatred of religion, but to genuine moral instincts. His "blasphemy" was not against the Supreme God, but against Jehovah. . . . Paine, in short, with all his brutalities, had the conscience of his hearers on one side, and we must prefer his rough exposure of popular errors to the unconscious blasphemy of his supporters (i. 463). [*Sic. Query* "their supporters" or "his opponents."]

JOHN M. ROBERTSON.

(To be continued)

Correspondence

HOW TO DEAL WITH AN ATHEIST

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—Your article in the *Freethinker* of August 22 mistook my point. In my sermon at Chorley, I was not dealing with "An" Atheist, or Atheism in general, but with "Our" Atheist, Mr. J. V. Shortt.

In my letter to you, covering this one, I have suggested regularly dealing with the Atheist position in your columns, if we can come to some arrangement about space. I think it would be a valuable addition to your paper.

You must not imagine that Christian pulpits are occupied in launching attacks on absent enemies. Our work is the constructive, inspiring creation of the finest possible citizenship through Christian Regeneration. I have no wider experience of the constructive work of the Secular Society than you have of that of the Christian Church, but I do know that "Our" Atheist, Mr. Shortt,

has continually been pressed to give us a constructive alternative to the system he is trying to destroy, and has failed so far to give us one. I have also read the *Freethinker* right through, and find no constructive ideas in it at all.

Paragraph 3 seems to imagine that I take Atheism as being "due to the Theists not being as good as they ought to be." What I *did* say was that possibly, if Mr. Shortt were to examine his mental processes, he would find that the real reason for his attack on religion was not intellectual difficulty, but some bitterness caused by a "trauma" or mind-wound; and that his attack was what the psychologists call a "defence" movement against this trauma. This Mr. Shortt admitted to be the case; it proved to be an accurate diagnosis of "our" Atheist. This, of course, is not to say that Mr. Shortt does not intellectually accept the position he now occupies; as an honest man, he does; it only points out the pre-disposing cause of his activities, which had been puzzling our people quite a bit.

It also gave me a chance to emphasize to our own people how un-Christlike many of our acts and words are, and what harm we do to folk. This is a point I am always emphasizing. It is a part of my "outspokenness."

To say that one Atheist has a trauma which leaves bitterness in his mind, and adds it to his speech, is not to say that all Atheists are in the same state; though one notices the same bitterness in most of them. I do not know, for instance, whether it would be correct to diagnose your own case as one of trauma. I should suggest that your opposition, to Christianity at least, arises from your racial origin; though you are not even an orthodox member of your own religion, having opposed yourself to its claims and principles; so perhaps there may be a "trauma," after all, even in you.

Your attitude to your own Scriptures is not peculiar to your own race. It is common in all Churches and in many pulpits. The principle on which many seem to act is, "I don't like this statement in the Bible; throw it out"; or, "I can't understand this; it must be wrong." Whether we like or dislike statements has nothing to do with it; nor whether we can understand them all. The fact remains that the statements are there; and my experience goes to show that the more closely they are examined the more emphatically true they prove to be.

I shall be glad to receive your own works which you offer me. I regret that I had not previously heard of them, and, as you so ably put it, "Even in the pulpit, where understanding is not vitally necessary," one cannot deal with things that one has never heard of.

I have no "ambition effectively to deal with Atheism." It has been done long ago; but I do feel that the Christian position should be put effectively in the circles where it is most needed, namely, in the columns of the *Freethinker*.

In your paragraph 4, I greatly regret that I have caught you indulging in that "careless thinking," which seems also to afflict "our" Atheist. You head your paragraph, "God's Way with Atheists," and then you quote the case, out of Deuteronomy, of one who entices another to "go and serve other gods." Surely this is not the work of the "Atheist"? If you had thought more carefully, and if you had known the kind of moral cesspool into which the seducer was trying to lead his (or her) victim, you might have felt that such "soul-murder" warranted the death-penalty. You must, through your studies, be well-versed in the horrors of early polytheistic religions, and you will not suggest that the Atheist wishes to seduce us to that? But when, and if, it becomes part of Atheist labours to seduce men to prostitution, sodomy and all kinds of sexual perversion, with the accompanying syphilis and venereal disease, then I will plead that such "soul-murder" and "body-murder" should be dealt with by the death-penalty. And I hope you will stand with me then; but not until such an end is the declared purpose of the Atheist.

So that it is not correct to put it, as you do, "The Atheist ought to be killed—if Christianity be true": it would be correct to say "The Atheist ought to be killed—if he is seducing men as the Canaanite religion seduced men." That, of course, he is not doing; but perhaps

you would feel that even such seduction of "godists" would be better than leaving them their religion.

I have quite "risen to" the fact that Atheists are not Atheists because of bad Christians, though they seem to spend much time in vituperation. Mr. Shortt is continually jibing at Christians; in fact, there are times when I quietly wonder if he is not trying to see how far the Christians will let him go before he rouses them to "un-Christian" wrath. I have heard him himself express surprise at the way in which Chorley Christians give him a patient hearing; one would almost imagine he was somewhat disappointed. You yourself seem to give him his head, for in your own article concerning me, you jibe at me personally, and at Christian people, no less than seven times in the first paragraph, nine times more on the first page (total for two columns, 16); and overleaf nine times more, a grand total of 25 personal remarks which were entirely beside the point. May I remind you that "Abuse is no argument"?

Now, sir, your own statement in your last paragraph is entirely accurate; "There is really only one way of dealing with the Atheist that decent men and women can adopt; that is, listening to one's reasons for being an Atheist and proving them to be unsound."

I have shown you, in the *Chorley Guardian*, how *unsound* is the Evolution Theory which Mr. Shortt supports; I have shown you to-day how *unsound* your own interpretation of Deuteronomy is. Again, in the *Guardian*, I have shown how *unsound* Mr. Shortt's attacks on "The Drunkenness of the Bible" were (this you have not dealt with). I am ready, if necessary, to continue this healthful process indefinitely; and I think that proves how *unsound* is your statement that "Mr. Carnson never takes risks."

I greatly appreciate your remark concerning me:—

"This poor man is like one trying to bring down a new bombing plane with a sixpenny packet of fireworks."

"New bombing plane" is *good*! We have evidence in Shanghai and in Spain of the havoc wrought to inoffensive people by the bombing planes; and as to the fireworks, listen to this:—

There was once one who said, "Am I a dog that thou comest to me with staves?" And he boasted, "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the field."

And his opponent answered him:—

"Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear and with a shield, but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied."

But David did not use a sixpenny firework. His victory was only that of a stone out of a brook—*plus* God.

(Rev.) MAXWELL CARNSON.

THE RECALL TO FREETHOUGHT

SIR,—In your issue of August 29, Mr. Norman Charlton expresses his inability "to see the point" in my article, "The Recall to Freethought."

My point is that all religious beliefs, whether claiming to be orthodox or not, are based upon Freethought, because unless supernatural revelation is accepted as their origin (and this is disproved by their variety and contradictions) there is nothing to base them upon except Freethinking. No sane person can be an unbeliever in the operation of natural law—to that extent thinkers of all grades are Materialists—but sane people can and do either believe or disbelieve in the existence of some particular form of Deity presiding over the universe and the planet inhabited by mankind.

As regards the second part of the article, it was really meant to show the comical way in which the above argument might be worked out, and the company in which high ecclesiastics might unexpectedly find themselves. It was, in fact, written "satirical like," and even intended to be amusing, as a note of exclamation, which in the original MS., followed the mention of the "Pope of Rome" might have helped to show. But from every point of view the accidental omission from the article of the passage which directly connected its argument with its title, must have baffled many readers of it as it stood in the *Freethinker* for August 15.

It is necessary to add that "Freethought," in my article, was not discussed as representing—which it obviously does—the stand against every form of religious intolerance, untruth, and suppression, past or present.

MAUD SIMON.

BERTRAND RUSSELL AND ATHEISM

SIR,—It was remote from my intention to "reprimand" Mr. Taylor for a mistake which was obviously excusable. Since Mr. Russell "sometimes" calls himself an Atheist, is it surprising that others should fall into the same error? I proved that Mr. Russell is not logically entitled to the name Atheist, and if Mr. Taylor is an Atheist himself, he should not resent my warning against the repetition of misnomers which place weapons in the hands of our detractors.

Mr. Taylor suggests (after the event) that I adopted the wrong line of attack, and indicates the line which, in his opinion, I should have taken. But there is no evidence that, if I had done so, I would have had any greater success. The fact that the editor of the *Radio Times* refused to print my second letter (which, in any case, demolished Mr. Chesterton's false implications) convinces me that Mr. Taylor's suggested line of attack would have met with a similar fate.

C. S. FRASER.

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

INDOOR

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, S. K. Ratcliffe—"What They Believe."

OUTDOOR

BETHNAL GREEN AND HACKNEY BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 6.30, Mr. A. Leacy.

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES BRANCH N.S.S. (Kingston Market): Saturday and Sunday, 7.0, A Lecture. Literature for sale.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Highbury Corner): 8.0, Saturday, Mr. L. Ebury. White Stone Pond, Hampstead, 11.30, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury. Parliament Hill Fields, 3.30, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury. South Hill Park, Hampstead, 8.0, Monday, Mr. L. Ebury.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Brockwell Park): 6.0, Sunday, Mr. F. P. Corrigan. Rushcroft Road, near Brixton Town Hall, 8.0, Tuesday, Mr. H. Preece. Cock Pond, Clapham Old Town, 8.0, Friday, Mr. H. Preece.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Corner of Deanery Road, Water Lane, Stratford, E.): 7.0, Mr. I. Greenhouse.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 3.30, Sunday, Messrs. Bryant, Barnes and Evans. 6.30, Messrs. Bryant, Barnes, Leacy, Connell, Tuson and Miss Millard. Wednesday, 7.30, Messrs. Bryant, Tuson and Miss E. Millard. Thursday, 7.30, Messrs. Saphin, Bryant and Tuson. Friday, 7.30, Messrs. Barnes, Perry and others. The *Freethinker*, *Age of Reason* and Mr. Chapman Cohen's latest pamphlets on sale outside Marble Arch Tube Station every evening.

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