

# THE FREETHINKER

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Views and Opinions

All Night with God

NOTHING of a sensational character seems to have happened with regard to the Archbishop of Canterbury's recall to religion. There is no evidence that the population is more religious than it was last December, the Churches are not better filled than they were, and in general the people appear to be leading the same kind of life now as they did then. It is true that the Archbishop afterwards explained he does not expect “spectacular results,” which from our artful Archbishop is the kind of statement one might expect. Yet Christianity has always been a spectacular kind of a religion, and has flourished on spectacular happenings. It began with the birth of a child who had no earthly father, and ended its first phase with the execution of an incarnate god and his resurrection from the dead. As someone has remarked, Christianity began with a miracle and ended with a murder. Right through its history it has flourished on miracles, repeating nearly all those named in the New Testament. Its followers have had personal interviews with Satan; they have had visions of God and his son and his son's mother; and only last May the Archbishop, with the aid of a few drops of holy oil and much praying, managed to incarnate a god in the body of a very ordinary human being. If these be not spectacular events, what are they? Perhaps the Archbishop, when he said he did not expect spectacular results, meant only that the results would be such that no one would notice them. On that point I am inclined to agree with him.

\* \* \*

Keeping it Dark

But there appears to be abroad, and among those who should know, a feeling that things are getting worse with the Church instead of better. There is, it would seem, a feeling among the clergy that either God does not properly appreciate the situation, or he is not “pulling his weight.” This I infer from a

notice that appeared in the *News-Chronicle*, for October 1, announcing that on October 8 the “clergy and ministers of London,” feeling “deep concern in reference to the spiritual condition of the churches” would meet in prayer at the Y.M.C.A. building in Aldersgate Street, to explain the situation to God. I think that by “the spiritual condition of the churches” is meant poor attendances, since in no case that I can recall have ministers complained when their churches were filled.

There are two or three features to this call to arms—or tongues—that are worthy of note. Not merely the clergy of the Established Church are invited to take part in the prayer debauch, but Nonconformist “ministers” also.

The policy of a “common front” is to be set up. The clergy and ministers of London are not united with regard to their teachings, or doctrines, they are not united on the land question, the education question, on Capitalism or Socialism, on war or peace, on Conservatism or Radicalism, or on anything save this one question of decreasing congregations. On every question that divides ordinary laymen the clergy and ministers are divided. The one thing on which the clergy form a common front is to secure larger congregations.

Next, the meeting is to be held at night. The praying will commence at 10 o'clock and will continue until 6 a.m. Between those hours there will be no rest in the Y.M.C.A., Aldersgate Street, neither will there be any rest in heaven. Public notice has been given, and the recording angels are expected to be on duty all night, the Lord is expected to remain on the alert while the clergy and ministers of London express their concern for the spiritual condition for God's churches in the City of London. Aldersgate Street is cheek by jowl with the great market of Smithfield, and it is to be hoped that the angels will not confuse the prayers of the parsons with the language of the draymen and carriers who are distributing meat and other foods to the people of London. And we trust that no display of temper will be shown by heaven at the peace of night being broken by telling the Lord what He must already be well acquainted with. It looks like what is called “rubbing it in.”

There was, perhaps, strategy in this secret session. It provided an opportunity for the clergy and ministers engaging in some very straight talk that might, with an open meeting strike the average layman as being rather irreverent. A secret session would also enable the clergy to cease talking of themselves as mere worms, as weak and helpless, as given to do that which they ought not to do; of ceasing to say how much they depended upon the loving-kindness of God and to point out how much God depended upon them. They could point out with justice that if they went he followed, and that it was as much his

interest as theirs to pay some attention to the "spiritual condition of the churches." It takes all sorts to make a world, and it takes worshippers as well as a god to keep the deity on the map.

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### Some Plain Speaking

But, if I can place any reliance upon a certain report received, it appears that some very plain speaking *was* indulged in at this all-night secret session, and that someone disguised as a parson was actually present at the conclave. This alleged eyewitness has supplied me with the following report of one prayer that was offered to the Lord, and which strikes me as containing so much truth that no further reason is necessary to explain why the meeting was secret. Here is the prayer as provided:—

O Lord, maker of heaven and earth, thou who canst bend the wind to thy will, and can strike with a lightning flash them who flout and despise thy law; we who have been called by thee to the task of preaching your holy word are gathered here in the City of London in midnight conclave to lay before you our fears concerning the spiritual condition of your church in this great city. That condition is so grave that we who preach your gospel of love have so far forgotten our numerous quarrels, as to band together to meet a situation that threatens us all with extinction. And so that you may give us your attention more completely than might be possible during the busy hours of daylight, we have gathered by night, and so that the wicked might not find joy in our report, we have confined this meeting to the preachers of the Word, and only an official report will be given to the world.

In all humility, therefore, but with great distress, we call the attention of yourself, your son and the holy ghost to the present state of your worship in this country and elsewhere. Never was the situation so threatening. In one country the Government is openly and actively lending itself to the work of educating a population of one hundred and eighty millions to the conviction that you are no more than a dream—a mere creation of uninstructed intelligence. In another country of over sixty millions the people are being taught that you are nothing but a Jewish myth, and the gods that you overthrew centuries ago are now being placed in power. In another land, one in which is the oldest and the largest church of yours in existence, your religion is being dragged at the heels of a dictatorship, and is forced to support whatever that dictatorship decrees. In England, where, on the word of Canon Parry-Evans, of Bishop Auckland, whenever you "seek a champion" you turn to Englishmen "who never failed you yet," there are vast numbers who do not believe in your existence, and an even larger number who treat you as a negligible quantity. Worse still, there are some of your servants within the church, who count you as of less drawing value than a cinema, and who openly assert that while by yourself only a mere handful can be brought to worship you, with a cinema display, the church is filled. And on a fine Sunday the roads are crowded with merrymakers, but, alas, the churches are very empty.

This meeting, O God, is a private one. We may speak plainly, and we feel it is our duty to do so, as faithful servants who do not shrink from risking their master's displeasure by speaking painful truths. We have done our best to keep your sheep from straying, and have failed. But art thou, O Lord, without blame? Men did not doubt your existence, nor was your worship neglected in those days when you made your power manifest. Once upon a time you directed the earthquake and rode the storm. You held the planets in their orbits and girded Orion with his mighty belt. You displayed your pleasure in the smiling harvests and your anger in plague and pestilence, and when men saw

cities rocking to their foundation in an earthquake, or populations decimated by disease, those who knew you said with confidence, "Now we know that is the handiwork of the Lord."

But you have gradually withdrawn from the world and from its Government. Scientists no longer find your handiwork in what is going on in nature. A Minister of Health no longer seeks grounds for referring to you as the cause of disease or the source of health. Even Archbishops and Bishops in solemn conclave say that what men thought were cures effected by you are no more than the products of a certain mental uplift which may occur as readily with the Atheist as with the most faithful of your followers. And those men of science who remain faithful to your worship, reduce you to a mathematical symbol—that is, to a creation of man's intellectual ingenuity.

This, O Lord is a time for plain speaking. We cannot report to you in private, whatever we may say in public, that all is well, when we know that all is ill. We have done what we could; it remains with you so to manifest your existence that men can no longer have any doubts about you. Belief requires sustenance if it is to survive. It is belief to which you owe your existence, it was on belief that you grew great and powerful and feared. Without belief your churches will cease to exist; without belief even you may sink into nothingness.

Finally, we pray that thou wilt not condemn us for this plain-speaking. The occasion is serious. We are together, in the dead of night, with none of the people to listen or observe, and we must speak the truth. To the world we may report a great spiritual uplift, but we know how serious is our plight. We know that we sink lower year by year in the estimation of the enlightened public, and as we sink, you sink also. The process cannot go on for ever. You have yourself, O Lord, seen many gods go out of existence that were here before you. We pray you to take heed of that experience. Do something, we pray thee, or thou mayst follow these other gods into oblivion.

We print this report without reservation. We do not know the reporter from whom we obtained it, and we confess we find it difficult to believe that after so long grovelling before the Lord, the clergy have summoned up enough manliness to stand erect and tell him the truth. All I feel is that if the clergy as a body said what many of them felt, and if they decided to say what many of them knew to be true, and if they also resolved that it would pay them best to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, what they would say would be something on the lines of the report which appears above.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## A Memory of Mackenzie

"Alas poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy."—*Shakespeare*.

YEARS ago, a frequent contributor to the pages of the *Freethinker* was George Leslie Mackenzie, whose light and satirical verses were appreciated by a wide circle of readers. The best of these he afterwards collected, and published under the saucy title of *Brimstone Ballads*, a little volume which has long been out of print, but which now and again appears on the stalls of the second-hand booksellers. It was Mackenzie's only book, but it was, to use John Morley's expressive phrase, "a thunderous engine of revolt." Within a couple of hundred pages, *Brimstone Ballads* contained an astonishing amount of wit, satire, and argument. It was a happy idea on Mackenzie's part to commence his very profane book with some lively verses on *Genesis*, and to finish it

with some verses on *Cremation*. In this volume he proved himself the most uncompromising rhymester that ever attacked superstition in general, and the Christian Religion in particular. He showed the Orthodox Faith no mercy, and his statement of his iconoclastic point of view was well worth reading. So comprehensive an indictment of a very vulnerable institution could hardly fail to contain a great deal of truth.

Mackenzie himself was a fine man, a good Freethinker, and I was proud to call him friend. We first met, of all places, on a South London tramcar. We had fallen into conversation, and I had offered him a copy of the *Freethinker*. He replied, "I not only read it, but I write for it." "Who are you?" I queried, and I recall his humorous smile as he answered, jocularly, "Mackenzie, if it doesn't *mak enzie difference*." My first impression was something of a shock. You could hardly imagine that this quiet smiling, respectable, professional man could write a lively lyric, or turn a profane phrase against the theologies of the world.

I learned to love him well. If I were writing one of those chilly, stereotyped obituary notices, I fear I could not make a great story of what he had done with his life. He was a minor writer, and not a famous author, or a best-seller. Yet to those near to him he had the qualities which are quite as precious as those that make for fame and reputation. He had a merry heart and a kindly one. There was never a company not the merrier for his being there. Many are duller because he is dead. For he possessed, in no small degree, that vagrant, potent thing which men call charm. No wonder he took hold of one's mind as he took hold of one's hand with a warm, affectionate grip that lasted.

Although an excellent speaker, Mackenzie was never at his best or his happiest in the garish light of publicity. He loved better a few friends with whom he could talk metaphysics or literature, especially of the great French writers, for whom he had a real liking and admiration. He had the spirit of the idealist without the sharp edges that sometimes make the missionary of ideas less attractive to the world than one might wish. Above all, he was sociable in his idealism. A really modest man, he preferred the position of a common soldier in the Army of Human Liberation. This is the kind of work which does a man honour, but brings him none. He would have sympathized with the modest Frenchman who, when Napoleon took him by the shoulder, and offered him the coveted Legion of Honour, answered: "Thank you, sir, but could not you give it to my father?"

Mackenzie was employed in a great Government department, and his professional position would have made most men cautious, but timidity was unknown to him. All his contributions to this paper, some of them very profane, were signed with his name. It was in the scant leisure of a busy life that he composed his virile verses, and he chose the metrical form of writing simply because it demanded a certain amount of skill in using words. He was under no illusion as to the literary merit of his writing. "I know too well what a real poet ought to be," he once told me, "to imagine I am one." For, in my impetuous way, I had dubbed him "the Laureate of Secularism," a title that more properly belongs to James Thomson, a real and unmistakable poet.

A thorough Freethinker, there was no shadow of turning, no trace of compromise about George Leslie Mackenzie. It was this, perhaps, even more than his literary ability which earned for him the confidence and admiration of his many friends of many years. I saw him for the last time at Southend-on-

Sea, and he then talked with difficulty, and I could not but admit that my dear old friend had only a short time to live. Since then the fates have had their way with him. His name is with many other names, and the sight of his book on my shelves has set me thinking of him. I can, in my mind's eye, see him now as he stood quietly watching the sun shining on the sea that stretched far away. Now he is gathered to the quiet West, the serene sundown of death:—

"And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,  
A handful of grey ashes, long, long ago at rest,  
Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake;  
For death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take."

MIMNERMUS.

## A Check to Rome

FREETHINKERS who are inclined to believe that the days of fierce sectarianism are over will be well advised to keep their eyes on Merseyside during the next few months.

Liverpool, scene of so much blood spilled, and so many heads cracked for the greater glory of God and the brotherhood of man, is getting ready for another great religious struggle. The schools are the battleground once again, and the ratepayers' money the prize; tempers are rising, and even the truth is beginning to be blurted out—a grave sign of a crisis in the Christian camps.

Being an extreme case, Liverpool serves to illustrate facts and tendencies which in more moderate shape elsewhere may go unrealized and unchallenged. Here's the position: As is well known, Liverpool not only has a huge Protestant population, with a Bishop, a cathedral, a variety of sects, a not inconsiderable number of Orangemen, and a militant Protestant Reform Party in the City Council, but also a huge Roman Catholic population, with an Archbishop, an embryo £1,000,000 cathedral, and an Irish Party in the council. As may be not so well known, the city, badly hit by the depression, and staggering under unemployment and relief burdens, has cut and hacked its expenditure and its estimates down and down—£150,000 off the Public Assistance Committee's estimates wasn't enough, they had to go back and make it £250,000. Big ratepayers are thundering against the heavy rates, and forming protest and economy organizations; the Labour politicians are decrying the demerits of Tory rule, but apparently making little capital out of it; and the Conservatives go on hacking away at social services.

Then along come the Roman Catholic authorities with a plan under the Hadow scheme for reconstructing, building, and furnishing their schools in the city at a cost of £726,000. They want a grant. Certainly—how much? Seventy-five per cent, of course, the maximum they can get under the Act which made this folly possible. By all means, eagerly responds the Labour Party—like other Labour Parties on Merseyside, controlled by the Catholics and led by a Catholic—we'll try to get it for you.

And the Catholics, supported by the Catholic Tories and the Labour Party, are recommended for their half-million pounds from a depleted exchequer—an exchequer which has just taken a quarter-million back from the most defenceless of all, the P.A.C. cases. It nearly got through, too, but fortunately there were one or two people awake on the council at the time, and back went the recommendation to the committee, there to lie in cold storage

while the question of grants is thrown into the arena of the forthcoming municipal elections.

Now, however, enters another factor. The Catholics have applied for their half-million; the Anglican authorities so far have held their hand. And the Liverpool Conservative Party is as predominantly militant Protestant—an old tradition—as the Labour Party is Catholic. So up jump the Central Committee of the Workingmen's Conservative Association and enter the lists boldly with a cry of "No grants." The Association is a powerful influence in the Conservative Party—which is the main guard of Anglicanism in the city, the Protestant Reform Party in the council being a crude little sect on its own—and with other sections of the Party likely to follow its lead, it looks as though the Conservative Party will be forced to fight under the "No grants" banner, instead of a nice gentlemanly agreement on a compromise of 50 per cent grant, or even 66⅔ per cent.

Between the two of them, poor little education may come into her own a bit. That is perhaps too much to expect, but even the sober and responsible *Liverpool Weekly Post* gives a special contributor splash-type headings of "Sectarian Schools Battle on Merseyside: Irish and Religious Conflict Revived in Municipal Elections: Should Liverpool Find £500,000 for Catholics' Education?" And the special contributor (who is "an informed contributor") finds himself compelled to write:—

But discussion is sure to travel beyond finance. It is already being asked what the city is getting for the vast sums of public money that have been and are being spent on sectarian schools, Catholic and Anglican.

Recent statistics have shown that crime is most prevalent among the Catholic school children, a little less prevalent among Anglican school children, and least prevalent among the Council school children. (The editor thinks enough of this paragraph to put it in black type.)

Later, after discussing Liverpool's own peculiar "Irish problem" (the huge Irish population and the continued influx of emigrants from the Free State), the contributor states:—

If there has been no real uplift of the Irish community of Liverpool for the best part of a century, the suggestion is inevitable that the school and home education of the young leaves much to be desired.

At this juncture the question of questions for the ratepayers of Liverpool is this: Is dogmatic religious teaching in the elementary schools, whether Anglican or Catholic, more successful in producing good citizenship than the kind of teaching that is given in the council schools?

Will the answer justify spending of over half a million pounds for the perpetuation of Catholic instruction, plus whatever the Anglicans may later ask for?

If our "informed contributor" has had a slash at the Catholics, he appears to be no real friend of the Anglicans either; and both sides may well feel that such men are dangerous. When rogues fall out, there's always a chance for honest men, and there is many a ratepayer in Liverpool who is going to ask himself that question, "Is it worth it?" and answer "No."

There is no need here to go over the well-known grounds of the case for secular education, or the many sorry tales to be told of the Churches' domination in this field; but in these days, when the sects are sheathing their swords and getting away with the devil's bargains they strike over our schools and our money, when champions of the past are forgotten and

their principles trampled on, the conflict at Liverpool is an illustration of the power of the sleeping beast.

It illustrates, too, another factor that is not quite so well realized among Freethinkers as it ought to be, especially in the South—the power of Rome in England to-day, and its increasingly dangerous power in the Labour Party.

Across the Mersey from Liverpool is Birkenhead, whose Labour Party also is controlled by Catholics and led by a Catholic, and which, being in power in the Council, has persistently refused to allow the Birkenhead Secular Society to hire the Town Hall, seeking to cover up its motive by lumping the Secular Society in with its political enemies, the Fascists and the Communists. The Party's Catholic leader has declared he would give up his politics before he gave up his religion; and when an M.P. he pathetically asked the House of Commons, in an Education Bill debate whether they would deprive the people of God. Which is enough to make a cat laugh; and if he knew the gentleman in question, the cat would probably split his sides.

We may smile, even Catholics may smile good-humouredly, at Bernard Shaw's gibe in his "Saint Joan" epilogue that England is temporarily in the hands of the Anglican heretics. Nevertheless, it is a serious reflection of the Catholic mind, in which there burns a belief that can lead a woman doctor to write in a booklet against birth control: "Our faithful Catholic mothers are doing a wonderful work for God. In time, if (wrong) methods of birth control continue to prevail amongst non-Catholics, their race will die out, and the Catholic race will prevail, and thus England will again become what it once was, a Catholic country. This is no fancy picture. Dr. Mary Scharlieb, in her evidence before the National Birth Rate Commission, showed that the average number of children in Catholic families in England was six, as against an average of three in the general community. . . . What a vision for us who love our Blessed Lord, a Catholic England!"

While the Rev. Hugh Pope, O.P., D.S.S., in his foreword can confidently declare: "To such women (the writer of the pamphlet), and to the Catholic Women's League in particular, the Catholic England of the not-distant future will owe an immense debt."

One may smile at their easy optimism, and their easier reading of social and economic factors, but one cannot smile at the zeal which animates these people who would throw England back into the darkness of Rome-ruled Christianity. One must fight them with every weapon available. *Laissez-faire* and lazy faith in the inevitable triumph of education and knowledge over ignorance and superstition, are as little possible to-day as in the days of Bradlaugh. *Ecrasez l'infâme* is still the only possible battle-cry

RONALD STANDEAST.

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#### PLAYING THE GAME

The game of life is exactly the same as any other game: if you play it well you really enjoy it.

Admiral Sir Lionel Halsey.

But knowledge grows! The gods  
Are drifting from the earth like morning mist;  
The days are surely at the doors when men  
Shall see but human actions in the world!

*The Death of Anaxagoras (W. Canton)*

## "The Way of all Flesh"

### I.

ENGLAND boasts of two Samuel Butlers, both unique in their own way, both brilliant satirists and writers. Most people, of course, knows the earlier Butler's *Hudibras*—at least, by name. In its day it had extraordinary popularity, it was quoted and read and laughed with, for nothing could be more congenial to the temper of the time than its wit and malice directed for the most part against the Puritans. Nothing exactly like it can be found in English literature—though several writers tried to capture its astonishing and often bizarre rhymes and thought. Butler could epitomize a philosophy in a brilliant line, and his poem is packed with vivid and vital epigrams which, like many of Shakespeare's, have become part and parcel of our language. The pity of it is that in the hurry and scurry of our day, we are apt to overlook such a masterpiece—and indeed many other masterpieces. Do many people read Scott nowadays, I wonder? How many of us know *The Heart of Midlothian* or *Waverley*? But those who delight in the glories of our literature will perhaps find time to read them, no matter how fascinating or thrilling are modern romances; and Butler's *Hudibras* will always find its readers. It is sad to think that with all his brilliant gifts, Butler died in extreme poverty, the lot of many geniuses.

The other Samuel Butler was like so many other Victorians, bitterly hostile to many Victorian institutions. The great Victorians did not always suffer from that complacency which ignorance considers always to be the hall-mark of the period. This is certainly true of the fighting Freethinkers, and even of many of those who did not subscribe to our views in matters of religion. And it was one of the characteristics of Samuel Butler to be an iconoclast—but he was, as the writer of the article consecrated to him in the *Dictionary of National Biography* says, "the most versatile of iconoclasts." He attacked "received opinions in religion, science, painting, archaeology, literary criticism, and music. But his most determined onslaught was on the canting, conventional morality in which the genteel children of his age were reared." And to understand this we must turn principally to *The Way of All Flesh*, Butler's one novel, mostly autobiographical, and the book which gave him his greatest popularity, and made people turn with greater interest and understanding to his other works.

Samuel Butler was born in 1835. His father was a clergyman who took his son's education very seriously—indeed, far too seriously, if we are to believe the account Butler has given of it in his novel. He was taught Latin and Greek, and even at a tender age was flogged into learning these two languages. If the picture given of his own life is true of many Victorian homes, then children in those days seem to have had a pretty thin time, the father demanding obedience and respect out of all proportion, in the majority of cases, to his worth. To complete his education Butler was sent to Shrewsbury School, and later to Cambridge. From the age of 25 to 29 he was in New Zealand, making some money, and on his return lived in London for the rest of his life, visiting the Continent almost every year.

Butler was, when back in London, anxious to become an artist. He worked very hard, and for some years exhibited at the Royal Academy—no mean feat. He even succeeded in having one of his pictures bought for the nation and it can be seen at the Tate Gallery. But however ambitious and hard-working

he was, he recognized that in art he never would become a master, and he reluctantly gave up art, turning to writing, not for a living, but because he felt he could write and had something to say. And, as has been said, that something constituted a bitter satirical attack on many established opinions.

He criticized Darwin in *Evolution Old and New*. He was convinced that in the form of mind and memory, some "characteristics" could be transmitted, and that they had a more definite place in the evolution of the species than he thought Darwin would admit. On a minor point, which Butler magnified to a major one, he quarrelled with Darwin; I think personally, that Butler was right, but the quarrel was eminently characteristic of the man.

To Freethinkers Butler's attack on the miracles of Christianity and the Resurrection are of the greatest interest. He dealt with them first in a small pamphlet, and then in the work entitled *The Fair Haven* (1873)—a book which in a small way caused a great stir, and which completely fooled and puzzled many readers and reviewers. Unlike the direct onslaught of Freethinkers, Butler made his work to appear as if it were actually a defence of Christ's miracles against Freethought and certain orthodox "unbelievers." It was actually accepted seriously by ultra-Protestant organs—and even the *National Reformer*, which reviewed it, seemed very perplexed as to its meaning, and suggested that it was a covert attack or a serious defence, and therefore "it required serious thought and answer." Butler pretended that *The Fair Haven* was written by "the late John Pickard Owen," and he appended a detailed memoir supposed to be written by Owen's brother. This memoir is a sort of foretaste of *The Way of All Flesh*—though if anything more subtle in its satire and humour. It is difficult to understand why the whole book was not immediately seen to be really a huge joke against the gullibility of Christians in accepting as absolute truth the hopeless nonsense of Christ's miracles and Resurrection. The Memoir surely is plain and clear enough for those who have the brains to understand. There is a delicious account of the way Owen and his brother, when tiny boys, are made to pray every night, and how a lady staying with them also used to pray every night before going to sleep—when she thought the boys were looking on. They pretended to be asleep sometimes, and then to their surprise they found the lady did *not* pray.

It is, however, impossible in an article or two to do justice to Butler's subtle satire and humour as shown in *The Fair Haven*. Its reputed author is described as always battling against unbelief. He joins the Baptists; he goes over to Rome; he becomes a Deist and is "shorn of every shred of dogma which he had ever held, except a belief in the personality and providence of the Creator." Eventually he becomes a broad Churchman. And finally, he is shown as thinking for himself, and therefore accepting a view of Christianity not at all acceptable to many other Christians. "With most men," says the Memoir in mock gravity, "the Gospels are true in spite of their discrepancies and inconsistencies; with Owen, Christianity, as distinguished from a bare belief in the objectively historical character of each part of the Gospels was true, because of these very discrepancies; as his conceptions of the Divine manner of working became wider, the very forces which had at one time shaken his faith to its foundations established it anew upon a firmer and broader base. He was gradually led to feel that the ideal presented by the life and death of our Saviour could never have been accepted by the Jews at all, if its whole purport had been made

intelligible during the Redeemer's lifetime. . . ." This kind of parodying the usual ecclesiastical memoirs has never been better done; and one can understand the unpopularity it brought its author from those who were not fooled by its apparently innocent phrasing.

In *The Fair Haven* itself will be found many most delicious specimens of Butler's satire, and the way in which, while pretending that he was fairly putting the infidel objections to miracles, he was all the time proving them to be unanswerable—except, of course, from the point of view of stupidity and Faith. The book must be read in its entirety to be appreciated, and as an example of the real Butler. It will explain much in *The Way of All Flesh*, and in *Erewhon* and *Erewhon Revisited*, his famous Utopian romances. Butler's waywardness in criticism can be seen in his insistence that the *Odyssey* was written by a woman—though in a passage which some critics seem to have overlooked, in *The Way of All Flesh*, he gives it as his opinion that it was really written by a clergyman.

Butler was probably writing *The Way of All Flesh* and *The Fair Haven* contemporaneously for he commenced to write his novel in 1872; and, as Mr. R. A. Streatfeild says, "he was engaged upon it intermittently until 1884." After that year he seems to have occupied himself in other ways, but kept on re-writing and revising his book. Actually it did not appear during his lifetime, but was published the year after his death—in 1903. Perhaps this was as well, for in it he introduces himself in the person of his hero Ernest Pontifex, and his father and mother, and many people whom he had met. Everything which happens in the book is possible, that is, we get the everyday life of living people, and not impossible and fantastic situations. And Freethinkers in particular will be interested in the caustic and very often bitter attacks on orthodox religion, which perhaps more than anything else, either made the reader acclaim *The Way of All Flesh* as something unique in novels or put him off with disgust as a shocking example of blasphemy.

H. CUTNER.

Channing was taken as a child to hear a Calvinist sermon. The preacher did his work thoroughly. The sunlight of life retreated at his word; clouds blew up from the horizon; the spiritual landscape became first overcast, then awful with a storm of woe and judgment; most of mankind appeared to be lost in the havoc. The child was frightened. "William, for his part, supposed that henceforth those who believed would abandon all earthly things to seek salvation, and that amusement and earthly business would no longer occupy a moment. The service over, they went out of church. . . . A heavy weight fell on his heart. He wanted to speak to his father; he expected his father would speak to him in relation to this tremendous crisis of things. They got into the chaise and rode along, but, absorbed in awful thoughts, he could not raise his voice. Presently his father began to whistle! At length they reached home; but instead of calling the family together, and telling them of the appalling intelligence which the preacher had given, his father took off his boots, put his feet upon the mantelpiece, and quietly read a newspaper. All things went on as usual. At first he was surprised; but, not being given to talking, he asked no explanations. Soon, however, the question rose—'Could what he had heard be true? No! his father did not believe it; people did not believe it! It was not true!' He felt that he had been trifled with."—*The Fatal Opulence of Bishops*."

Methinks that in the discussion of natural problems, we ought not to begin at the authority of the texts of the scriptures, but with sensible experiments and necessary demonstrations.—*Galileo*.

## Acid Drops

No one who knows and understands the parsonry could imagine that the clergy of Blackpool would easily give up the attempt to utilize the teachers to carry out the policy of marching the children to special, and sectarian, religious services—particularly as members of the local education authority so little understood their public duty that they became party to the religious plot. It will be remembered that the teachers refused to play any part in the business, and the N.U.T. supported the teachers in their "revolt." The pity is that the N.U.T. did not let the matter stop there. But correspondence between the N.U.T. and the Blackpool Education authority is still going on, and in two recent communications the N.U.T. protests that while the teachers object to taking part, as teachers, in any direct form of sectarian demonstration, they are ready to identify themselves "wholeheartedly" in the giving of religious instruction that is authorized by the law, and in a covering letter to this communication the N.U.T. assures the Authority that the teachers "reaffirm their willingness to co-operate to the fullest possible extent in religious instruction within the schools."

We do not like this assurance, not because we object to all religious teaching in State-aided schools, but because it indicates a too great readiness to come to terms with those who are anxious to make a teacher rather more of a parson's catspaw than he is at present. The N.U.T. must know very well that there are large numbers of teachers, male and female, who object very strongly to religious teaching in the schools, and that while their "job" depends upon their giving it, they do not give it wholeheartedly, and do not even co-operate loyally in the matter. The narrow-minded religious teacher, who so often lacks education in the better sense of the word, imports into the religious lesson many definitely sectarian teachings that are forbidden. And the more liberal-minded teacher salves his conscience by turning the religious lesson into an ethical one. To speak of the teachers co-operating "wholeheartedly" in the carrying out of the religious teaching in the schools, is to talk nonsense. It is not true, and the N.U.T. knows this as well as we do. It is time the N.U.T. spoke with more courage, and acted upon some principle that intelligent men and women could "wholeheartedly" respect.

In the circumstances we are glad to note in a recent issue of the *Schoolmaster*, an article from Mr. C. L. Berry, Director of Education for Wakefield, on the coming "Bible Centenary," which offers further evidence of the humbug that will be perpetrated in the schools so long as religion is there. Mr. Berry points out that not merely is the talk of "The Fourth Centenary of the English Bible historically misleading, but the faked centenary is being used to get special Bible lessons delivered in the schools by the teachers, and the occasion is being utilized also to identify the movement with a glorification of Evangelicism and one form of Protestantism." Mr. Berry is quite justified in saying that special talks on the Bible, the Reformation, the Evangelical Revival, etc., which will probably be given under the guise of history, with all the distortion of historical fact with which the propaganda of religion is associated, is a flagrant breach of the Education Acts. And what would happen if a teacher either declined to give this "cooked" history, or gave his pupils a true version of these movements, and the influence of the Bible in encouraging the belief in slavery, in witchcraft and in all sorts of superstitions? Would the N.U.T. then be ready to protect the teacher, or would it repeat the idle verbiage about loyal and whole-hearted co-operation with the Education Committee? We should not be surprised if it did.

But Mr. Berry after giving us a pail of moderately clean water, at once proceeds to kick it over. He says almost, if not quite approvingly, that there is a growing

body of opinion in favour of there being given in the schools definite and positive instruction in the Christian faith in accordance with an agreed syllabus. He says it is believed that:—

Such instruction will, in co-operation with the Churches, strengthen the allegiance of the child to organized religions . . . on such a foundation each denomination can build its own dogmatic system and its own devotional life.

If that means anything it means that Mr. Berry believes it should be part of the work of the schools to train children for the churches. The schools, as we have so often said, are to become breeding grounds for clients for the churches and chapels.

In a world in which the number of adults are growing less denominationally religious, and in which specific religious doctrines are being more authoritatively questioned year by year, this Director of Education believes that systematic religious instruction should be given in the schools in such a form as to hand over the children to sheer sectarian influences. After that we could hear of Mr. Berry's resignation from his post without any serious misgiving as to the future of the children in Wakefield schools. A Director of Education who thinks it is part of the teacher's duty to turn out children who are easy material for manipulation by the different religious sects has surely much to learn of the quality of healthy citizenship. And the N.U.T. promises "whole-hearted" co-operation with the Education Authorities in giving religious instruction in the schools!

The B.B.C.'s comic parson, the Rev. W. H. Elliott, has just published a volume of his mid-week sermons. We haven't read the volume and don't think we shall—mainly because we have listened to many of them, and minus his voice they would not be nearly so amusing as they are "over the air." But there is never anything in them, and for that reason we are not inclined to quarrel with Mr. Elliott's own statement that there has been an astonishing response to his mid-week services. We have ourselves come across a number who find Mr. Elliott's performances very comforting, and whom we are quite certain would be shocked if they heard some, on the music-hall stage, say exactly what Mr. Elliott says in his sermons. Then they would feel that the comedian's representation was intended for a burlesque. When they meet the real thing in Mr. Elliott the clown is overlooked. Until we heard Mr. Elliott we would not have believed that a man could have spoken so lengthily and said nothing. Of late, whether in consequence of what we have so often said or not we cannot say, but Mr. Elliott seems to have toned down his music-hall manner. But he is still worth listening to for those who are able to appreciate a few minutes unconscious funniness. And the hopeless ones of the Christian world will accept him as a very comforting preacher, much on the lines of the old lady who said that she loved to go to church when her favourite parson was preaching. Then, said she, "I can just sit back, close my eyes, and think of nothing."

Another example of what Christian leaders can do when they feel they have the right kind of audience. A Catholic paper says:—

If our Lord is really and truly divine, and could not only change water into wine, as he did at Cana, but also create the whole universe out of nothing at the beginning of time, surely He could change bread into His body? And he himself has told us that the bread is changed into His body.

Now we agree with every word of that. If anyone, God, devil or man, can change water into wine, and can create the whole universe out of nothing, then everything else is child's play. Believe in a God and anything and everything may follow. As Voltaire said of the saint who walked one hundred paces with his severed head under his arm, anyone can believe ninety-nine of the paces, it is the first one that presents the real and only difficulty.

Irish pilgrims to Lourdes brought back with them bottles of holy water for distribution amongst their friends. We have a suspicion that many of them would have better appreciated a bottle of good brandy, which as a pick-me-up may be much more safely commended. But why trouble people to go to Lourdes to get water? Why cannot the Virgin manage to bless local springs everywhere, and so provide a constant source of relief and a constant manifestation of her power! The unbusiness-like way in which this miracle business is run is little less than a religious scandal. Why does not the Virgin commission some leading film publicity agent to take the matter in hand? Just imagine what he would make of it!

Attempts are being made in the Isle of Man to get the different religious bodies to sign a memorial against the new Matrimonial Causes Act becoming operative in the island. The usual reason that "Our Lord" was opposed to divorce is given, also that the Manx people do not desire further facilities for divorce. Maybe not, but the new Act does not say that everyone, or even anyone, must get divorced. It merely puts it within the power of those who wish for a divorce to get one, provided reasonable justification can be shown. How does that injure anyone, Christian or non-Christian? Are Christians afraid that if the opportunity for divorce is given a great many of them will get divorced? If that be the case, the sooner these couples are separated the better. But the Christian idea of liberty is nearly always that of being able to interfere with the freedom of other people, and his notion of justice to do something unpleasant to his neighbours. The new Act cannot add to the number of actual divorces, it can merely give legal sanction to a larger number. And family life should be the cleaner and the healthier for it.

One can depend upon the clergy never missing an opportunity of getting money, and when there is some kudos to be gained by playing into the hands of the clergy one can also depend upon people abusing their office—whatever that office may be—in order to oblige. The latest evidence of this kind of thing that has come into our hands is a circular issued by a Provincial Grand Master of the Freemasons asking for all Freemasons to contribute towards the Blackburn Cathedral Building Fund. The appeal says:—

The history of Freemasonry is very closely linked up with the building of the great cathedrals . . . and as speculative masons, the successors of the operative masons who built these cathedrals, we should rejoice that we can still take part in the building of a cathedral of the future.

We have our doubts whether Freemasons did play a great part in building cathedrals, but the idea of the present order of Freemasons being the successors of the earlier builders of cathedrals is very, very amusing. The circular says they are *speculative* masons, and we are left wondering what on earth a speculative mason is. It looks as though one of the functions of some of the leaders is to speculate as to how far they can fool the rest. We would like to get the opinions of some Masons on this point of collecting for cathedrals. We have managed to get the opinions of several acquaintances who are Masons, and comments are not very flattering to the author of this ridiculous circular.

A great many people have been bothered about the guarantee given by Jesus, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." But the Rev. Dr. F. E. England explains away the difficulty. He asks, "Imagine what would happen if a million were to ask at the same time for a million exemptions from God's normal routine." Of course, the result would be chaos, and the request would be absurd, and therefore the guarantee given by Jesus is absurd—at least that seems the obvious inference. But having pointed out the absurdity of the teaching if one takes it to mean what it says, the next job for the believer is to make the text read so that it means something completely

different from its obvious meaning. By this method the Bible is always right. After all there would be no merit if what one is asked to believe was clearly in line with common sense or human experience.

Preston has elected its first Roman Catholic Mayor since the Reformation. We note this mainly because the Mayor accepted office only on the condition that he would not attend the Parish Church on the customary Mayor's Sunday. This departure from custom is welcomed by the *Lancashire Daily Post* on the ground of its permitting men whom the community delights to honour not being compelled to sacrifice their conscientious objections to attend a Church in which they do not believe, or play the hypocrite for the sake of municipal honours. If we wish to have men in public office whom we may respect, we should begin by not demanding an initial sacrifice of intellectual decency. So far, good.

We welcome the Preston move for another reason. The office of Mayor is not a religious office. He does not, as Mayor, represent any religious body at all, and he is not, or should not be, elected on account of his religious opinions. He is simply the chief magistrate, that and nothing more, unless we count in his chairmanship of the town or city council. Yet all over the country we have men who are Christians, non-Christians, or anti-Christians, going through what is to them a piece of solemn mummery merely because it is customary, or because they are selling themselves for office. Such a state of things does anything but secure that the best men shall occupy public offices; actually it makes for the elevation of the poorer type. This practice of advertising the parsonry should be abolished. It is no part of the law that it should exist, it is mere custom, on all-fours with the primitive custom of visiting the supposed dwelling-place of the local "Joss" in order to get his help. And if a number of those who are elected to the post of Mayor, or Chairman, had the moral courage to refuse to go to Church on a special Sunday, the practice would soon cease. The abstention of a number would advertise the declining power of religion, and the clergy would not like that.

Every decent-minded person must feel shocked at the callous slaughter of women and children and non-combatants in China. This time there can be no doubt whatever as to the stark aggression of Japan, or of the reasoning that lies behind it. It is the reasoning that has been trumpeted abroad by Mussolini and Hitler, and to which the rest of Europe, Britain included, has so tamely submitted. But massacres in China are really no worse than massacres in Abyssinia, or Spain, or the brutal drawn-out torture of Jews in Germany. Numbers add nothing to the fact; a greater spectacular value adds nothing to the fact. The brutality and the injustice are there whether a hundred, or a million, or a few million, people are involved. Yesterday we were shocked to think of mass attacks on unarmed civilians. To-day we are accepting them as one of war's inevitable consequences. Which is another illustration of what we have been saying all our lives, that the longer warfare is taken as an inevitable feature of human civilization, the more brutalizing it becomes; the less it tends to settle any genuine difference that exists between human beings. We are not pleading for a foolish pacifism. Our objection is to that glorification of militarism which pretends to find something grandly heroic in the military life. We may take war in given circumstances as inevitable, but unless we are honest enough to admit that it involves a necessary degradation, we are using each war as a fresh instrument for making that degradation more marked.

The New York *Truth Seeker* informs us:—

Down in Woodbury, Tennessee, John Davis, 65, his wife 34, his son 14, and two daughters aged 11 and 8, eked out a "Tobacco Road" existence. Their mule died from overwork and underfeeding, leaving John

with the corn patch yet to be plowed. Time was a-wasting, so he hit upon the bright idea of hitching his wife and son to the plow.

The son gave the following information:—

"Pa plowed me and Ma for two weeks afore we got the corn patch done. Me and Ma pulled the plow and he steered it.

"Every time we said we was hot or tired he said to keep goin' and he'd spell us at the pullin' in a minute. He just never done it.

"We all was mighty 'feared of Pa. He whipped me and Ma and he hit Evelyn with his fist.

"If we didn't jump when Pa told us to do something, he fetched us a crack right off and made us git. He ran us all off a couple of times and beat us when we come back. He said he was goin' to run Ma off for good when he was able.

"When Ma was real sick and cryin' for water, Pa wouldn't give her none. Sister started to git her some but Pa boxed her one and told her to mind her own business. Ma died the next day.

"When Ma wasn't plowin' she was weavin' baskets. Pa took the baskets most of the time and sold 'em. Then he'd go off and git drunk, He'd always come home mean."

John Davis boasts that he has read his Bible from cover to cover 16 times. He begins his 17th reading in jail on a charge of murdering his wife.

An Ilford to Aldgate tram has two religious society cards posted up: the one reading "Drink is Man's Worst Enemy"; the other, "Love Your Enemies." Well—many a "jovial monk" and modern priest could attest the truth of both. Yet we foresee the withdrawal of one of these texts from a juxtaposition revealing so clearly the accommodating nature of religious "guidance."

## Fifty Years Ago

NAMES like Teufelsdröckh, Devilshoof, the Devil on two sticks, and so forth, indicate a spirit of irreverence which is displayed still more fully and familiarly in the common appellations of Old Nick, Old Harry, Old Scratch, etc. In the famous *Ingoldsby Legends*, written by a clergyman, the whole subject of diabolism is treated as mere food for fun. St. Medard cuts the devil's bag open with a Brummagen oyster knife and releases the many victims whom the poor hungry Devil was expecting to fricassee for a toothsome supper.

Our priest-ridden ancestors employed the Devil's name rather familiarly. Hence we frequently find such names as the Devil's Chair, the Devil's Kitchen, the Devil's Fryingpan, the Devil's Chimney, the Devil's Dyke, given to remarkable rocks or caves or hollows or mounds. The name formerly given to the great cavern under the Peak in Derbyshire illustrates the contemptuous manner in which the coarse jocularity of past ages could drag in his Satanic Majesty's name. Mingled, however, with comparisons or allusions which were often more or less frivolous or contemptuous, there was also a highly commendable sense of justice displayed in our forefathers' allusions to the "old gentleman," as is shown in the injunction to give the Devil his due, and in the highly unorthodox conclusion that the Devil is not as black as he is painted.

A brief examination of some of the liberties commonly taken with the Devil's name in colloquial speech shows that the general belief in diabolism is far from being of a really deep-seated or influential character. The little jocularities, familiarities, buffooneries, and trivialities so often seen in the popular use of the quasi-sacred name of the leader of the opposition in the affairs of the universe, display him in a comic or familiar view rather than in the solemnly hostile spirit which would be displayed by those who believe and tremble. The world has revolted from the ecclesiastical Devil. He has become a laughing-stock in his old-world guise, and a mere figure of speech or idiomatic seasoning of rollicking phrases in the actual words and thoughts of living men.



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

T. H. WOODLIFFE.—Another proof has been sent you as requested.

W. H. CLASPER.—Mr. Cohen has not written any special work on Spinoza, but he has often intended doing so. He has naturally dealt with certain aspects of Spinoza's teachings, from time to time, and owes more to Spinoza than to any other man for the texture of his own thought.

KENNETH INGRAM.—We are sorry we did you the injustice of giving you the title of "Rev." But the reference to your book did not state that it had been recently issued, it merely cited the volume as illustrative material. And if the *Freethinker* is to be considered out of date because a book is cited that was published seven years ago, how are we to consider the Churches when they cite from the Bible?

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

## Sugar Plums

To-day (October 17) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Pictou Hall, Liverpool. Admission will be free, but there will be reserved seats at one shilling each. Chair will be taken at 7 o'clock. On Sunday next Mr. Cohen will lecture in the McClellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow.

The Leicester Secular Society opened its winter season last Sunday evening with a lecture from Mr. Cohen. The hall was well filled, and there was rather more than the usual number of questions at the close of the address. There were visitors present from Lincoln, Nottingham, Derby and other places. Mr. Hassell occupied the chair and made an appeal for stronger and wider support for the Society. We hope this support—financial and moral—will be forthcoming.

In the States, Congress has provided for a grant of public land in Washington, for a site on which to erect a monument to Robert G. Ingersoll, as proposed by the Ingersoll Memorial Association, sponsored by the Freethinkers of America. This has led to the following action by official Presbyterianism:—

Therefore be it resolved, by the Washington City Presbytery, in meeting duly assembled in the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, that we are unalterably opposed to any legislation of the type and character disclosed by the said Joint Resolution "H. J. Res. 235." That it is the humble opinion of this meeting that the efforts of Congress should be directed in supporting religion and not advancing Atheism as it is religion that upholds law and order. That to honour those who seek to wreck our religious thought would also be detrimental to the moral welfare of our youth for many of these would view this material glorification. That if monuments of a religious character are to be erected, it would be well to erect them to those who have given their life work and some even their lives to spread the gospel of Christianity and uphold moral and religious tenets.

If there is one man, next to Thomas Paine, in the United States, who deserves public recognition, it is Ingersoll, but Christian malignity is very deadly and never forgets, particularly when the man who is the object of their malignity has done so much as Ingersoll did for the "mental uplift" of the American people.

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. is back at its old quarters in the Bristol Street Schools where its Sunday evening

meetings will be held. To-day Mr. R. H. Rosetti will be the speaker, at 7 p.m. Subject: "A Search for God." The help of local Christians will be appreciated, and members of the Branch are asked to bring their orthodox friends on this occasion. Admission is free, with questions and discussion.

The new Greenock Branch N.S.S. made an excellent start with its indoor meetings last Sunday afternoon. The Co-operative Hall was comfortably filled, and Mr. Rosetti's lecture was followed very closely. Fortnightly meetings will be held on Sunday evenings in future. There was also an excellent meeting in the Kent Hall, Glasgow, in the evening, the hall was filled to capacity. Mr. Rosetti's lecture was well received, and a long chain of questions followed. The Glasgow Branch N.S.S. is certainly making headway and deserves all the support the local saints can give it.

A Committee has been formed, with the Bishop of Manchester as Chairman, to make 1938 a "Bible Year for Britain." The Committee Secretary says that "newspapers, B.B.C. and Educational Authorities will be enlisted to urge Britain to become a nation of Bible-readers." The Committee can rely upon the *Freethinker* pulling its weight. Already, the sale of *The Bible Handbook* is exceeding expectations. Nothing would please us better than that the Bible should be intelligently read by more people.

Despite our expressed hope that readers would not deluge us with replies to the letter of Mr. Carnson, we have received several lengthy answers for which we really have not room. We printed Mr. Carnson's reply to our criticism, and also his reply to Medicus. To this amount of our space Mr. Carnson had a right, and his right was respected. But it is a different matter to print a number of letters from which Mr. Carnson would have a further right to the use of our columns. If Mr. Carnson showed any real understanding of evolution, and raised any pertinent difficulty, the situation would be different. But a man to enter into a controversy should show some understanding of the problem at issue. No useful purpose could be served by taking up space on a controversy in which one of the disputants has obviously to learn what it is that is under discussion. Now, if Mr. Carnson had suggested that a controversy should be arranged, either on evolution and religion, or on Christianity, in the *Chorley* newspaper, we would gladly have obliged. In the *Freethinker* the conditions are different.

On Saturday evening, November 14, a Social will be held in the Bishopsgate Institute, Bishopsgate Without, London, E.C.2. The Executive of the N.S.S. will be responsible for the arrangements, and the programme will consist of dancing, vocal items, with a "Few Words" from the President; and opportunities for introductions and conversation with friends from different parts. Tickets, including refreshments, are 2s. 6d. each, and should be applied for without delay from the General Secretary N.S.S., 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Bishopsgate Institute is centrally situated within three minutes walk of Liverpool Street Station (L.N.E.R. and Underground), also Broad Street, L.M.S., Tram Routes serving N.E. London, terminate outside the door, and buses from different parts pass the entrance. The Institute is well known as an educational and cultural centre, and the large hall in which the Social will be held will please dancers and non-dancers alike.

By an arrangement with the Executive of the N.S.S., Messrs. Brighton, Clayton, Shortt, and Mrs. Whitefield undertook a regular round of lectures in areas within easy access during the open-air season now closing. The experiment has been very successful, and, although at times the speakers have had to meet difficult situations, tact and good humour have come to the rescue, and our message has reached many new districts—often to the alarm of the local clergy and religious interests.

## Helen Keller and her Gifted Instructress

THE history of Helen Keller's life almost rivals romance. When barely two years' old, the child was severely smitten with scarlet fever which deprived her of the senses of sight, smell, and hearing. Fortunately, however, she found a guide and instructress in Miss Anne Mansfield Sullivan, whose marvellously patient teaching, and constant and loving companionship enabled her afflicted pupil to attain a wide culture, which included the mastery of several languages and empowered her to compose a most interesting autobiography and other volumes. Moreover, Helen Keller's literary ability, as well as her serene outlook, form a striking testimony to the educational system adopted by Miss Sullivan in assuaging the sufferings, while developing the intellect and character of a blind, deaf mute.

In her *Story of My Life*, Miss Keller states that she faintly remembered her illness, and the tender solicitude of her affectionate mother. The early experiences of infancy seem to have left some slight impression when, bereft of sight and sound, she grew accustomed to the darkness and silence of her surroundings, which soon seemed quite natural. "But," Helen declares, "during the first nineteen months of my life I had caught glimpses of broad green fields, a luminous sky, trees and flowers which the darkness that followed could not wholly blot out."

By means of gesture, Helen made her wants known, and at the age of five she was able to fold laundry, place it in drawers, and distinguish her personal belongings by the sense of touch. As she grew older, her increased requirements necessitated a more elaborate gesture—language and her many failures to convey her meaning led to petulant displays of passion. These regrettable, if quite understandable, incidents, greatly grieved her parents, who resided at Tuscomb, an isolated townlet in Alabama, far removed from any institution for the blind and deaf. But, with the kind assistance of the celebrated scientist, Dr. Graham Bell, and others, Miss Sullivan was interviewed and engaged as preceptress and companion to the afflicted child, then in her seventh year.

A doll dressed by the famous Laura Bridgman was presented to Helen, and her new teacher spelt the word *doll* into her pupil's hand. This act the child successfully imitated, and was highly proud of her achievement, although as yet unconscious of its meaning. "I did not know," she writes, "that I was spelling a word or even that words existed; in the days that followed I learned to spell in this incomprehending way a great many words, among them *pin*, *hat*, *cup*, and a few verbs like *sit*, *stand* and *walk*, but my teacher had been with me several weeks before I understood that everything has a name." When, however, she realized that every object is specified, her intellectual progress was immensely accelerated.

In the happy spring season Helen was taken to the banks of the stream, where the flowers bloomed and the birds sang, and given her first lessons in natural history. She discovered that the glorious sun is the sovereign lord of light and life—and how the trees and blossoms make beautiful the earth. She was told of the beneficent rainfall and the form and habits of the squirrel, deer and other wild creatures. All Nature seemed serene, until one day they were caught in a violent thunderstorm, when the then novel lesson was imparted that Nature "wages open war against her children and under softest touch hides treacherous claws."

Having acquired the capacity to construe simple terms, the deaf mute was taught to read. By using raised letters for the blind, Helen soon realized that each printed word signifies some mode of existence. An acquaintance with biological science was made through the study of fossils and living plants and animals. Miss Sullivan's vivid descriptions of botanical specimens, of furred and feathered things and tadpoles swimming in a globe of water until they evolved into full grown frogs made an indelible impression. So Helen declares, "I learned from life itself. At the beginning I was only a little mass of possibilities. It was my teacher who unfolded and developed them."

By the sea-shore she felt the inrush and retreat of the waves, and a basis was established for an appreciation of the magnitude of our earth, and the vastly greater immensity of the starry heavens. Helen's first conscious experience of winter's iron reign she recalls when expressing her amazement when she first discovered "that a mysterious hand had stripped the trees and bushes, leaving only here and there a wrinkled leaf. The birds had flown, and their empty nests in the bare trees were filled with snow. . . The withered grass and the bushes were transformed into a forest of icicles." Then came the silent snowfall mantling everything in purest white.

Helen, in her tenth year (1890), began to articulate. She had ever evinced an earnest desire to speak, and when she was informed that a youthful Norwegian deaf, blind mute had been trained to utterance, Helen was more anxious still to speak. This task was undertaken by Miss Sarah Fuller of the Horace Mann School. "I shall never forget," Helen writes, "the surprise and delight I felt when I uttered my first connected sentence, 'It is warm.' True they were broken and stammering syllables; but they were human speech." Miss Fuller's initial teaching was then developed by Miss Sullivan's method, and as a result of the latter's "untiring perseverance and devotion" her pupil made an astounding progress towards natural speech.

Miss Keller's reading became extensive. Her opening studies were unavoidably confined to the few books then available in embossed print, but subsequently she had access to the leading writers of England, France and Germany. The ancient classics and the Bible also became familiar. "Greece, ancient Greece," she writes in her autobiography, "exercised a mysterious fascination over me. I knew and loved the whole tribe of nymphs and heroes and demigods—no, not quite all, for the cruelty and greed of Medea and Jason were too monstrous to be forgiven, and I used to wonder why the gods permitted them to do wrong, and then punished them for their wickedness. And the mystery is still unsolved. I often wonder how

God can dumbness keep,

While Sin keeps grinning through His house of Time."

It was surmised that a study of the psychology of one so richly endowed by Nature as Helen Keller might assist in the solution of mental phenomena still obscure. But, as Miss Sullivan urges, these hopes were unwarranted. "It is impossible," she states, "to isolate a child . . . so that he shall not be influenced by the beliefs of those with whom he associates." And it should have been obvious that a naturally inquisitive mind must have been stimulated somewhat abnormally by Helen's peculiar form of training, and that she would meditate concerning the unknown and transcendental.

At the age of eight, Helen was puzzled over her origin and destiny. The answers to her questions, because disappointing, reduced her to silence. But as the years passed on and her faculties unfolded, the

multifarious impressions derived from the customary experiences of life, reinforced, as these were, by ideas arising from the perusal of many books, caused her to generalize on the nature of existence. As her knowledge of language increased, while her observation of surrounding things extended, her power of expression grew greater. Thus, she was able the better to divine the beliefs of her intimates, as well as their limited capacity, and apparently in consequence she seems to have conjectured that "some power, not human, must have created the earth, the sun, and the thousand natural objects with which she was familiar."

Helen's reading in Kingsley's *Greek Heroes* and other volumes, had made her acquainted with the terms *god* and *goddess*, while various Christian terms occur in the pages of many standard writers with whom she was acquainted. And in 1889 a pious relative tried to explain the meaning of the word *God* to the child, and such fancies as she entertained were clearly derived from this conversation and from books. Miss Sullivan assures us that no one had previously mentioned *God* to Helen, and there is not the slightest sign that the concept of a creator is innate.

After the relative's abortive effort to impart theological lore, Helen remarked to Miss Sullivan that: "A. (the relative) says *God* made me out of sand: but it must be a joke. I am made of flesh and blood and bone, am I not? Here she examined her arm with evident satisfaction, laughing heartily to herself. After a moment she went on: 'A. says *God* is everywhere, and that he is all love; but I do not see how a person can be made out of love. . . . Then A. said another very comical thing. She says *He* (meaning *God*) is my dear father. It made me laugh quite hard, for I know my father is Arthur Keller.'"

The name, *Mother Nature*, was familiar to the child as the begetter of sunshine and rain, and the caretaker of trees and flowers, and she wondered what the occupations of *Father Nature* were. Her questions in 1890 became so persistent that Miss Sullivan decided that it was no longer possible to withhold information on religious themes. So, writes Miss Sullivan, "after a great deal of thought and study, I told her, men came to believe that all forces were manifestations of one power, and to that power they gave the name *God*."

Helen silently meditated for a few minutes, and then inquired, "Who made *God*?" Miss Sullivan admits that she was compelled to evade this awkward question, and many others equally embarrassing. For Helen desired to know what materials *God* used in his world-creating exploits. She also inquired: "Where is *God*?" "Did you ever see *God*?"

When Helen heard of our heavenly home she asked: "Where is heaven, and what is it like? Why cannot we know as much about heaven as we do about foreign countries?" Her native scepticism was also shown when friends spoke of the intense happiness that is experienced in heaven, for she immediately inquired: "How do you know, if you have not been dead?" Finally, having heard of *God*'s constant care, there occurred a devastating storm on the ocean when several people were drowned. This led her to ask: "Why did not *God* save the people if he can do all things?"

Miss Sullivan pays a striking tribute to Helen Keller's moral character: "She knows with unerring instinct what is right, and does it joyously. . . . To her pure soul all evil is equally unlovely."

T. F. PALMER.

## Nature Notes of a Freethinker

"Next him September marched, eeke on foote,  
Yet was he heavy laden with the spoyle  
Of harvests riches, which he made his boot,  
And him enricht with bounty of the soyle:  
In his one hand, as fit for harvests toyle,  
He held a knife-hook; and in th' other hand  
A paire of waights, with which he did assoyle  
Both more and lesse, where it in doubt did stand,  
And equall gave to each as Justice duly scanned."

Spenser.

THROUGH the brown vesture of grass that has withered and wilted during the drought, fine swords of new shoots have thrust their points. The brown pin-cushions of earth have become alive with the newly-born spikes of fresh shoots which hold the dew in the morning in a seeming frugality. Green alive, symbol of hope and regeneration, who shall sing the praises of that which is biblically called all flesh? Who shall record with true value the millions of munching animal mouths by day and night, filled with the coat of common earth? And from the earth, through a process of transformations we live. In a book that ought to be better known,<sup>1</sup> *Word of the Earth*, by Anthony Richardson, the Shepherd says, "There's only one way to know the grass. You must lie full-length on your stomach, with your nose stuck close to the ground. Look slantwise along, low down, with your eyes on a level with their stems. You'll see 'em then—the thin poor shoots you tread on. You'll see the feelings that shake 'em, and the way they grow. They're all like men. Fine-looking, some of 'em, and crooked and queer the others. Different characters: different dislikes; but they're all fastened tight to the earth. It's only the stems that get blown away that die. The others don't. You've got to get your roots into the earth, and, what's more, mix your roots with others. It don't matter much if your head's higher up than your mate's, but it matters a lot if your roots ain't firm." "You've an affection for grass that you don't consciously realize," replies the Physicist. "You like it for the reason that it helps you. Because it's part of your livelihood. Because it's necessary for your existence indirectly. I am afraid you are a very ignorant old man." "It doesn't signify," says the Shepherd. "Grass is like men, and that's all there is to it. It's like women too. Soft and tempting, and cuts your fingers if you ain't careful." The varieties of grass make an interesting study in themselves. Under the simple name of grass there are infinite species of good, bad and indifferent, all depending on what result is required of them. Disliked by farmers, couch grass is accounted as a remedy for kidney trouble. Common Timothy growing in the meadows in Spring—strip its rod-like head, and then the small boy on mischief bent, stealthily and slowly, twines the stem in the little girl's hair and gives it a tug. Yorkshire Fog, with a golden and fluffy head; Quaking grass, or Trembling grass as it was called by the country boy, that quivers in the slightest breeze—Noah was fortunate when his multifarious requirements did not include the hundreds of specimens of grass. A poetic truth about grass that sticks in my memory is in two lines from *Persephone in Hades*.<sup>2</sup> Persephone was told to

"Smile on the grass; humble and generous,  
She feeds us all, that do but trample her," . . .

The perfume from grass when bruised is a thing of delight to the senses that have resisted perversion; the swathes of the mower throw up a fragrance that make Elysian fields to anyone who knows that if the golden age is not present to him at that moment, he is walking in the dark.

On the North Walk at Lynton, in Devonshire, the heralds of Autumn had turned the bramble leaf from green to yellow, gold, and deep orange. The bell heather and ling, still beautiful, had lost their summer

<sup>1</sup> William Heinemann, Ltd.

<sup>2</sup> By Ruth Pitter. (A. Samriac, Auch, Gers, France).

freshness, and blackberries were as plentiful as hares, fallacies and bugaboos in the literary and journalistic world. Before I actually knew the setting of Blackmore's novel, *Lorna Doone*, I had been in love with the romance and simple beauty of the story. I first read it when a boy of ten years of age, and in a youthful way had visualized Lorna's bower as being in a wood on the banks of the River Trent. As a schoolboy there was to me, the big stone in the corner of the wood where Lorna signalled to John, and for my purposes that setting was good enough. Much later in life it was possible actually to traverse the scenes in this novel, and there is to anyone capable of knowing the human heart a singular beauty in Blackmore's description of the valley which is enclosed by rocks. "All the middle of the valley," he writes, "was a place to rest in; to sit and think that troubles were not, if we would not make them. To know the sea outside the hills, but never to behold it." Mother Meldrum's Cave, Oare Church, Robbers' Bridge, and many other places were visited, and it was amusing to remember that one writer's powerful imagination could people these places even in 1937 with figures of the past. The potency of the written word is something to be recognized and acknowledged. Old farms are in abundance in the district, and on reaching the edge of Exmoor Forest and beholding the immense stretch of country, together with the insignificance of a human being, I experienced a sudden understanding of Thomas Hardy's treatment of tragedy and destiny in the figures which fill his various novels. There was a vastness in the stretch of moor, valleys, combs, ridges, and hills which sometimes seemed to melt into the sky. Here was a scene to bring home to the thinker the insignificance of the individual and the terrific begging of the question when it was imagined that providence had a special plan with each tiny moving fragment of humanity on such a vast landscape.

In Lynmouth there are two cottages, both old and beautiful, which claim the honour of having housed Shelley when he was wanted for his political sins. Enquiries could not elicit the truth as to which one he had actually inhabited, or whether he had occupied both, but in any case one can, without much stretch of imagination, picture the enchanting place of Lynmouth Harbour a hundred years ago. The charm of Devonshire drew Keats to its arms, and I could picture no more lovely place than this and the surrounding country to be that which evoked his lines, *To Autumn*. There is in the following a clear conception of the bountifulness of Mother Earth, and if the youth of to-day can only see it the poet will have accomplished his mission when the prodigality of Nature is better distributed in the form of food. Richard Jefferies, who did not account himself an economist, states somewhere that mankind has not even thought of creating a world granary for the conservation of grain. This seems common sense even to the uninitiated, as a squirrel will hide nuts for use when the winter days arrive. Here then, is the musical white magic of a poet:—

#### TO AUTUMN

"Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;  
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
Until they think warm days will never cease,  
For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells."

At the present moment there does not appear to be any real reason to throw one's hat in the air on beholding the works of some of the lords of creation, but in the words of the old Italian proverb, "If Youth knew how, and old age were able, there would be nothing that might not be done." There might be enquiries about the squandering of food which now has become an accomplished fact and not a matter of controversy. In one of *The Ten Principal Upanishads*,<sup>3</sup> there is an in-

<sup>3</sup> Put into English by Shree Porohit Swami and W. B. Yeats. (Faber & Faber, Ltd., 7s. 6d. net.)

junction about that which sustains us. To those who resolutely decline to be bothered with the apes who make the simple complex in some blether about progress (to where, or what for, does not enter into the matter) I present the following extract:—

Respect food. Life is food; body lives on food. Body is life; life is body; they are food to one another.

He who knows it stands on a rock; commands everything, enjoys everything; founds a family, gathers flocks and herds; grows famous through the light of Spirit; is a great man.

Perhaps the loaf of bread to the baker appears in a different aspect from that as viewed by the philosopher. I have seen a starving man ravenously eating a loaf, and his hunger was such that he, in addition to cramming his mouth, put some of the pieces in his ears. And this, striking on the memory, reminds me that years ago, my course in life was decided. I was to be, in a small way, a member of that community, compelled, in a good phrase from the above-mentioned book, to "gnaw the knot of ignorance." True philosophy is nothing else, but there are cakes and ale all the same.

NICHOLAS MERR.

## Pain and Providence

MR. HILL, in your issue of July 25 appears to doubt my statement that sensations of pain in an organism are reduced to a minimum when the nervous system is actively mobilized in efforts of escape or self-defence.

A simple test of the truth of this is to recall the scuffles (if any) of our schooldays, when we probably sustained many minor injuries without being aware of pain—not realizing until afterwards that we had bruised lips, cuts and displaced teeth!

The same law operates with regard to sensations of fear and terror. Fear is merely the warning of danger, and largely disappears when the organism in which it arises takes adequate or even apparently adequate action. Only when the power of action is inhibited does fear take on the extreme form of terror.

The preying animal does not often chase his prey for long, but falls suddenly upon it from an unsuspected source. Death is skilful and instantaneous, since no shriek must be allowed to summon competitors to the meal. The beast of prey that relies on the chase usually loses his victim, since it returns to the safety of the burrow or herd.

Mr. Hill will appreciate the difference that is indicated here between death in the course of Nature, and as imposed by man. In hunting for sport the animal used is either tame or is driven out of its natural lair of safety by the mechanical ingenuity peculiar to man. There is no herd, no lair, to seek whilst it is hunted, and therefore extreme terror is present. In slaughter-houses, too, the animals are left sometimes for days in a condition of helpless terror generated by the groans and smell of blood of other animals slaughtered in the meantime.

It is doubtful if Mr. Hill's reference to insect mortality is relevant, since consciousness of pain depends upon the complexity of the brain and nerve structure, which in insect life is very elementary. It is doubtful if pain, as we know it, exists at all.

I am not, by any means, attempting to deny that there is a tremendous amount of pain and suffering in the processes of nature—far more than enough to disprove the existence of a Benevolent Creator. At the same time, the statement that "every mouth is a slaughter-house and every stomach a tomb," certainly does not fit the facts.

Vegetarian animals are overwhelmingly preponderant the carnivores few and far between. As Darwin, Kropotkin, and others have pointed out, the apparently defenceless vegetarian creatures—including man's ancestors—learned the arts of gregariousness and mutual aid, which were the powerful and successful instruments securing their survival in vastly greater numbers, and on a higher plane of development than the carnivores. It

is because of this that I criticize Col. Ingersoll's remark regarding it as untrue and misleading—just as Tennyson's phrase "Nature red in tooth and claw" is misleading and out of date.

In applying the term "carnage" and "holocaust" to the processes of Nature in order to refute the Christian conception of an All-loving Creator, we are, I fear, apt to over-state the case and damage the utilitarian argument for Atheism.

This method of attack is purely negative, and has involved Mr. Hill in saying that "the responsibility for the infliction of death rests with the Creator." Obviously it cannot be the purpose of Atheistic Materialism to substitute a Malevolent Creator in place of the fatuous Christian Conception of a Benevolent One.

The great lesson of Atheistic Materialism is that Man is the only agent exercising any degree of control over Nature together with considerations of order and kindness. There is no God—Nature is neither kind nor cruel. A clear conception of this should be a ringing challenge to man, who is actually (and still more potentially) extraordinarily skilful in his ability to control or adapt natural forces to the purpose of reducing distress as much as possible.

If there is no Merciful Creator, there is the quality of mercy in man, and since it has been adequately proved that flesh-foods are totally unnecessary to man, it appears consistent to exercise that mercy in abolishing the terrible cruelties of our slaughtering system.

In view of my feelings on this subject Mr. Hill will, I do not doubt, readily appreciate why I cannot accept his statement that it is 'only in non-essential details' that we differ.

JOHN A. TYSOM

## Correspondence

### TOLERANCE

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—I know that one must not intrude in the *Freethinker* party politics, but I think you would welcome discussion on the question of tolerance. At any rate I want to put before you and, if I may, my fellow Freethinkers my considered view on the desirability, nay, the duty of tolerant people being intolerant of one thing only, namely, intolerance. I am moved to write this by reading in a *Times* leader to-day these words, apropos of the march of the Mosleyites through Bermondsey. It writes of "an afternoon which reflected little credit on the citizens of London, whether they came with the foolish idea that the intolerant creed of Fascism should be met by intolerance or . . ." I wish to urge that what the *Times* calls a foolish idea (for reasons that may well be suspect) is on the contrary the idea that will be embraced, and, as far as may be, enforced by sane, well-balanced people with a sense of justice.

The grand ideal of *Justice* is to-day throughout the world receding more and more before the newer and (as I think) lower ideals of *Expedience* and *Peace*. The former ideal found its greatest expression in the ancient world in the teaching of the Jewish scriptures. *An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*. This is on the concrete, material plane. But the abstract arises from the concrete, and can be expressed thus: *Love for love, tolerance, hate for hate, and intolerance for intolerance*.

The teaching of Jesus and of Christianity is lauded as a new testament and a better way; *to love your enemies and to do good to those that despitefully use you*. But it is not the way of *Justice*, nor of *Mercy*; for one cannot be merciful till one has first been just. To be tolerant in all cases is merely the stigma of weakness, too often of cowardice.

For two thousand years men have been trying unsuccessfully to apply to their problems this perverted teaching of Christ. Is it not time to admit that that cock will not fight, and to return to the greater wisdom of the Mosaic law, which is now, as ever, based on equity and justice?

I am not a Communist or a Jew, but a Poet and an Atheist (i.e., one in the true meaning of the word, who is *clairvoyant*.) My range of visibility may be poor. If so, I await the instruction of those with longer sight. Till then, I plank down my belief and cry with Voltaire, in whose great country I am writing this, *Ecrasez l'Infame*.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

[We quite appreciate Mr. Bayard Simmons' hatred of intolerance, and we share it. But if all were tolerant, toleration would lose its meaning and its significance. To be tolerant of intolerance does not mean that one is either to let it alone or support it. It only means that the policy of force applied to opinion is wrong, irrespective of what the opinion may be. We resist, and ought to resist, any attempt to suppress opinion by force. We admit that the intolerant have us in this respect at a certain disadvantage, but he has society at a greater disadvantage who moralizes and establishes his own principle that a conviction of being right is warranty for suppressing what he considers to be wrong.

I am not quite so pleased with "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," as is Mr. Simmons, although I think it would claim the support of Hitler and Mussolini. Nor do I see that retaliation in kind comes up to a very lofty ideal of justice. That conception dominated our legal code when it was among the most brutal criminal codes in Europe. I prefer to row in with Confucius, to meet my friends with kindness and my enemies with justice. And I cannot see in what way justice and retaliation are equated—at least outside Christianity where the doctrine of eternal damnation is a quite natural expression.—EDITOR.

### MALTHUSIANISM AND WAR

SIR,—War and the danger of war are now the overshadowing interests of the world. It is therefore of supreme importance to analyse and discuss the causes of war. Hardly any attention, however, is given to this subject, and Freethinkers have little more to suggest than other people.

Two philosophies of war exist. One is the doctrine of Malthus, that war is mainly caused by pressure of population. This theory has of late years been rendered familiar, owing to its advocacy by General Bernhardt in his book published before the war.

The other theory is the conventional Socialist one, usually attributed to Karl Marx, although I have never found it in his writings. According to this view, war is mainly caused by the struggle between capitalists for markets for manufactured products.

I think it would be a very good thing if one of the Branches of the National Secular Society were to get up a debate on this subject. I would suggest that the question debated should be: "Is the Malthusian explanation of war more scientific than the Marxian?" As editor of the only Malthusian paper in England, I should be pleased to take the affirmative.

R. B. KERR.

### SIR LESLIE STEPHEN AND THOMAS PAINE

SIR,—I am very grateful to you for publishing this admirable essay of J. M. Robertson's, and the castigation was well merited.

In one place, however, Mr. Robertson's stroke was unjustified. Referring to the story that Adam Smith told Johnson that he was a "son of a bitch," he said, in a footnote (as printed by you): "I do not believe the latter version; but Mr. Stephen thinks 'it is too good to allow us to suppose that it was without some foundation.' Another example of Mr. Stephen's critical method." On referring to the page of Sir Leslie's book on Dr. Johnson to which Robertson referred the reader, I find the sentence is as follows: "*The authority, however, is too good to allow us to suppose that it was without some foundation.*" The authority was Sir Walter Scott! Surely here Stephen was justified. Scott was nineteen when Smith died, and is known to have been in his company. If he did not get it from Smith, it may have been passed on by a friend of his.

W. KENT.

## FREETHOUGHT AND FICTION

SIR,—One last word to Mr. Fraser on this matter. He says that he has no wish to destroy all works of fiction—carefully avoiding my point that dramatists, poets, actors, etc., are alike purveyors of fiction. Surely if his view that fiction should not be read had any chance of gaining the day (and I rejoice that it has not) the result would be that novels, plays, and poems *would* be destroyed, at any rate in so far as they would have no chance of reaching the public.

His imposing list of non-fiction writers may impress some readers, but surely the real point is not whether all novelists are worse than all historians or vice versa—it is whether there are many works of fiction which are of infinitely greater worth than the slices of tenth-hand information, ill-written and worse constructed, which are nowadays offered to us as outlines of this and that, as biographies, or as works of science. Personally, if I had to choose between the works of Thomas Hardy (all fiction) and the non-fictional works of Messrs. Hilaire Belloc and Beverley Nichols, I should have no hesitation in deciding which were preferable—nor, I feel sure, would any other Freethinker.

Mr. Fraser may himself have no liking for great novels. That is his affair. But he has no right to denounce, as purveyors of mental “dope,” many writers who have succeeded in providing entertainment for thousands of people, Freethinkers among their number.

JOHN ROWLAND.

## A COMPLAINT

SIR,—I am reluctant about using your valuable space in connexion with Mr. Carnson's letter, but I must complain against his repeating the remarks which are quoted as made by me, “how the parsons would run away from him.” This is audaciously put in commas, although the very use of the word “him” (meaning me, the speaker), could never have been used by me. What I would have to say might read, “how the parsons *will* run away from *me*.”

I merely call attention to this, Sir, because it typifies the loose use of the commas, and the resultant misleading of readers bordering upon dishonesty.

What I have more likely said is that parsons as a whole are not prone to debate these matters, and Mr. Carnson is no exception to this statement, because he has publicly, and in my presence, on the market place, stated that he would not degrade his saviour's name by entering into public debate on the subject.

I think that in pointing out the obviously falsified quotation, I will have shown readers of the *Freethinker* a little more evidence of “the-lying-for-the-glory-of-God” type.

JOHN V. SHORTT.

SIR,—After reading the letters from Margaret Collins and the Rev. Maxwell Carnson, I was distressed to read the tone of the editorial comments. Both letters were relevant and well-meaning, and (if comment were thought necessary) were deserving of courteous replies, instead of a display of bad manners, that could only bring discredit upon the paper, embarrass members of the N.S.S., and alienate the sympathies of potential supporters. How much better if, instead of sneers and affected superiority, the five points raised by Mr. Carnson had been answered.

WALTER FLETCHER.

[Mr. Fletcher, in our judgment, lacks a sense of proportion. Argument to be profitable implies an understanding of the question at issue, and anyone who looks again at Mr. Carnson's questions will realize that the necessary understanding of evolution does not exist therein. When a discussion of a subject takes place in the *Freethinker* readers have a right to expect that some regard to intellectual respectability shall be shown. We note that Mr. Fletcher is “greatly distressed” at our editorial comments; so, we expect, was Mr. Carnson.—EDITOR.]

## 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, W. B. Curry, M.A., B.Sc.—“Co-education”

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.): 7.30, G. Bedborough—“Christ and To-day.”

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH (Alexandra Hotel, South Side, Clapham Common, S.W.): 7.30, Mr. J. W. Poynter (Author *Roman Catholicism and Toleration*, etc.)—“Roman Catholicism and Freedom.”

## OUTDOOR

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.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 3.30, Sunday, Messrs. Bryant, Barnes, Tuson and Miss F. Millard, M.A.

## COUNTRY

## INDOOR.

BIKENHEAD BRANCH N.S.S. (Beechcroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane): 7.0, Dr. W. Olaf Stapledon, M.A. (West Kirby)—“Public Opinion.”

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Bristol Street Schools): 7.0, R. H. Rosetti—“A Search for God.”

BLACKBURN BRANCH N.S.S. (Jubilee Assembly Room, Market Hall, Blackburn): 7.30, Monday, Mr. J. V. Shortt and Miss Parry (Liverpool)—“Morality Without God.” Literature for sale.

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Laycock's Forum, Albion Court, Kirkgate): 7.15, Parliament Night.

BURNLEY (St. James' Hall): 11.0, Mr. J. Clayton—“Mind and Mystery.”

EDINBURGH BRANCH N.S.S. (Freegardeners' Hall, Picardy Place): 7.0, Mr. A. G. Senior—“Democracy or Dictatorship?”

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, Debate—“Should Secularists be Socialists?” Mr. A. Copland and Muriel Whitefield.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. A. D. McLaren—“The International Outlook, a Freethinker's View.”

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Picton Hall, Liverpool): 7.0, Chapman Cohen—“Are We Civilized?” Reserved seats 1s. Admission Free.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (“Burton House,” Burton Buildings, Oxford Road, Gray Street entrance): 7.0, Mr. G. Taylor (Cheshire)—“History with the Lid Off.”

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N.S.S. (General and Municipal Workers' Offices, Ferry Street): 7.30, Thursday, Mr. J. T. Brighton—“The Case for Secularism.”

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Green Street): 7.0, Mr. G. H. Dalkin.

## OUTDOOR

BLYTH (Fountain): 7.0, Monday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Stevenson Square): 3.0, Sunday, Mr. W. A. Atkinson.

MIDDLESBROUGH: 7.15, Sunday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

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The N.S.S. is the only organization of militant Freethinkers in this country. It aims to bring into one body all those who believe the religions of the world to be based on error, and to be a source of injury to the best interests of Society. It claims that all political laws and moral rules should be based upon purely secular considerations. It is without sectarian aims or party affiliations.

If you appreciate the work that Bradlaugh did, if you admire the ideals for which he lived and fought, it is not enough merely to admire. The need for action and combined effort is as great to-day as ever. You can best help by filling up the attached form and joining the Society founded by Bradlaugh.

### PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTS.

SECULARISM affirms that this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge, and that human effort should be wholly directed towards its improvement: it asserts that supernaturalism is based upon ignorance, and assails it as the historic enemy of progress.

Secularism affirms that progress is only possible on the basis of equal freedom of speech and publication; it affirms that liberty belongs of right to all, and that the free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilized State.

Secularism affirms that morality is social in origin and application, and aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind.

Secularism demands the complete secularization of the State, and the abolition of all privileges granted to religious organizations it seeks to spread education, to promote the fraternity of peoples as a means of advancing international peace, to further common cultural interests, and to develop the freedom and dignity of man.

The Funds of the National Secular Society are legally secured by Trust Deed. The Trustees are the President, Treasurer and Secretary of the Society, with two others appointed by the Executive. There is thus the fullest possible guarantee for the proper expenditure of whatever funds the Society has at its disposal.

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