

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions

### The Truth about the Godless Conference

I REALLY ought to have known better! with nearly fifty years experience of what a certain type of Christian, and some Christian journals can do in the shape of "lying for the glory of God"; with this experience, backed by a knowledge of what the Church has done during its history in the shape of forgery, slander and vilification, I ought to have been prepared for the carnival of falsehood that has been running in full spate concerning the Freethought Congress that will be held in London in September. Mark, I say *will* be held, for nothing short of the establishment of a Fascist dictatorship will prevent it. Parsons may rave and religious journals rant, the Congress will be held, the arranged speeches will be made, and the Congress will be a success—a larger success than it might have been without the advertisement the Great Lie Brigade has given it.

As an apology for my unreadiness for the outburst of Christian malignity that has occurred, I may plead that there seemed nothing likely to arouse it. There was no mystery about the Conference, neither was there any secret. The International Federation of Freethinkers—renamed the World Union of Freethinkers—was formed over fifty years ago, and its first meeting was held in London. It is, and always has been, outside the realm of politics. It has no political programme, and it does not discuss political issues. There is a Proletarian Society of Freethinkers, but this was formed because the World Union had no political aims. The World Union of Freethinkers follows the plan of every other federation in its general constitution. It admits to affiliation every society of Freethinkers that cares to join. At the same time each affiliated body has its own constitution, and is at liberty to pursue its special aims in its own way. The Proletarian Union of Freethinkers was formed because the constitution of the World Union was non-political, and it could not pursue political aims inside the Union. There is nothing here that does not obtain with a federation of Trades Unions, or any other Federation.

It obtains in the British Empire. Federation for some general purpose, individual action for individual aims. Since its formation the Federation has held its Congresses in Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Rome, Barcelona, Prague, and other places. Its meetings have been held openly, and most of the speeches published. It has been attended by many of the most famous names in Europe, and in most places it has received a public welcome from the municipal authorities. Why, then, the activities of the Great Lie Brigade, with its assumption of some deadly plot hatched abroad? That is a complaint the early British might well have brought against the introduction of Jesus Christ into these islands.

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### The Great Lie Brigade

The first information the Great Lie Brigade had of this Conference came from these columns. There was no other source from which it could then get the news. Directly after the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society (Whitsuntide, 1937), I published in these columns the news that the N.S.S., the Rationalist Press Association, the Union of Ethical Societies, and the South Place Ethical Society had agreed jointly to invite the World Union to hold its 1938 Congress in London. The invitation was spontaneous, and until September, when the Executive of the World Union met, we did not know that our invitation was accepted. At the first meeting after the acceptance I was elected Chairman, with Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner as Secretary. *The whole of the expenses of the Conference were to be met by the Societies named.* The Congress is to cost the Union nothing. No other country is asked or is expected to subscribe, and up to date no other country has offered or has promised to subscribe, and if I know anything of these other countries, none will. The arrangements for the Conference—meeting places, speakers, subjects, etc., etc.—while submitted to the general Executive as a matter of form—have been entirely in the hands of the London Committee, and its suggestions constitute the adopted programme. The speeches and discussions are to be kept within the non-political policy of the Union.

Up to this point everything seemed quite plain and simple. There did not appear to be room for the Great Lie Brigade to indulge in its favourite pastime. That is where I underestimated its virility. Hitherto I have treated Christians as I have treated other men—never to assume them to be liars unless I found them to be so. I have been taught now that, where religion is concerned, it is safer to treat a Christian propagandist as a liar until I know he is telling the truth. *The Universe*, the chief British organ of a Church that has lied and slandered and forged more industriously than any other institution in history, was the first in the field. It began with information which, it said, was derived from abroad, when it knew



that the news could only appear abroad after being received directly or indirectly from the English Committee. But the *Universe* knew that to the people on whose credulity it lived, news from abroad suggested an atmosphere of dark and deadly plots, framed in secret and stealthily transmitted. The *Catholic Times* joined at once in the campaign; the *Catholic Herald*, held out for a bit, but was probably forced into line. I say this because as far back as November 29, the *Herald* wrote me saying that "We have not so far backed up the campaign against what is called the 'Militant Anti-God Congress.' We have not done this because I am not satisfied as yet that there is any proof that the Conference of the International Union of Freethinkers is associated with the other International. You have denied it in strong language in the *Freethinker*." I wrote giving the required information, but, so far as I know the editor did not avail himself of the information. I presume he had been brought to heel, and had joined the chorus.

The better class of Protestant religious papers were more cautious. To their credit the *Church Times*, and the *Christian World* have steered clear of editorial co-operation with the Lie Brigade. But the *English Churchman*, *The Guardian* and others joined in the cry. The *Sunday Dispatch*, that champion of freedom, on the Hitler model, announced in its issue for February 6, that the Congress had adjourned its meeting from Easter until September—an obvious lie. It may be pointed out that the Easter date was selected by the G.L.B. because it lent a kind of flavour to the lie that the Congress was ordered direct from Moscow. Easter is the date of the resurrection. A further statement was that Russia had contributed 150,000 roubles to the expenses of the Congress. In that case I am afraid it must have been entrusted to some Roman Catholic agency, for it has not reached the Committee.

Some of the Irish papers joined in—out of sheer regard for the preservation of England's welfare. In many parts of the country committees have been formed to get a monster petition presented to the Home Secretary imploring him to ban the meeting. A Mr. Watts, of the British Bible Union, has published a pamphlet on the subject, and in the *Daily Sketch*, prominence is given to his statement that in the Atheistic campaign "violent atheistic propaganda (whatever that may be) is being sparingly used to make it less obvious." It is hard lines. If we are "violent," we are wrong. If we are not violent that is worse, for it is proof that we intend to be.

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#### Recruits for the G.L.B.

It is only fair to say that in addition to the papers that have refrained from volunteering for service in the G.L.B. some others have admitted protests from Christians against any suppression of the Congress. Among these protesters is the Christian Evidence Society, which, true to its tradition, cannot help stating a falsehood even when it is doing something apparently decent. The Secretary sticks to the April date, which never existed outside the imagination of the Catholic press, and says that "such a Conference will do nothing but good, seeing that the propaganda which has been going on in secret for a number of years will now be brought into the light of day."

What confidence these people have in the folly of the class to which they appeal, and what cunning lies behind it all! For many years the C.E.S. in common with the rest of the religious press, with their hands on their hearts, assured their supporters that Atheism was dead. And from that message they hoped to reap their reward—financial and otherwise. Now when that game is almost played out, when the Archbishop is tearfully imploring the people to return to religion,

and when the coffers of some of the propagandist societies are running dry, the tune undergoes a sudden change. Atheism is not dead, it is very much alive, it is roping in "young people"—as though these are not on the whole far more mentally alert than those who have grown grey in the service of the gospel—the campaign for Atheism is being carried on in secret, let us drag the monster into the daylight. First the appeal to greed, next the appeal to fear.

Carried on in secret! For a hundred years the campaign for Freethought and Atheism has been carried on in this country in halls and in the open air. For over seventy years the N.S.S. has carried on a perfectly open campaign, and each of its leaders has been an avowed Atheist. When did Bradlaugh, Foote or myself make any secret of Atheism? If anyone should know the truth about Atheism in this country it is the Christian Evidence Society; seeing that its advocates have been (intellectually) booted off so many Freethought platforms they must be like the character in *Hudibras*, who had been kicked so often that he

... could tell whether

The boot was Moroccan or Spanish leather.

The *Freethinker* has been issued for fifty-seven years. When has that conducted its atheistic campaign in secret? I venture to say that all the papers that have published the story of the Congress being ordered by Moscow, or being arranged by Moscow, or paid for by Moscow are telling a deliberate lie. It is not a blunder, it is a calculated untruth. If they wanted the truth they need only have asked for it. But the few who have asked for it have not felt that it would pay them to print it. The *Catholic Herald* asked for the truth. It got the truth, promptly, and the reader has seen what use was made of it. On February 6 the *News-Chronicle* followed me, by 'phone, to Edinburgh and wanted to know the truth. The paper got it, but nothing appeared in its columns. It probably fancied that the truth might offend its Christian readers. One of the Sunday picture papers asked me for the truth on February 11, and got it—with the same result. These papers do not want the truth, they want profit, they want sensationalism, they want circulation. But the truth! As the screen Yankee says, "it makes me laff."

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#### Rogues or Fools?

I am not inclined to bother with the handful of Members of Parliament who are imploring the Home Secretary to forbid in this country an Atheistic Congress as an insult to God Almighty. Sir Samuel Hoare is powerless in the matter. In England Atheism is not and never was an offence at law. And, after all, if God Almighty can stand the insult of the support of this parliamentary gang he can well put up with a Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers. If we may paraphrase the old saying that a man is known by the company he keeps and assume that it applies to gods and their followers, and I see no reason why it should not, Messrs. Dundas, Magnay, Ramsay and the rest reflect little credit on the deity.

But there is the money that Moscow is said to have sent to England for the expenses of the Conference. Unfortunately, that is not true, and, as the expenses are being met by the English societies, Moscow is not likely to throw its money away. But in order to make the matter quite clear, I hereby announce, as President of the National Secular Society, and as Editor of the *Freethinker*, and so responsible for meeting the deficit which is incurred in the weekly issue of this paper, that if Moscow, or America, or Timbuctoo, the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the Chief Rabbi, cares to send me a few thousand pounds to



meet the recurring losses on the *Freethinker* or to finance the propaganda of the N.S.S., it will be accepted and publicly acknowledged. But it must be given unconditionally. It cannot be given to buy control of either the Society or the paper. Neither is in the market. That is what makes the *Freethinker* distinct from other papers, and the N.S.S. distinct from many of the Churches. And, I wonder whether, when the Churches or Chapels receive money from abroad, they demand a certificate of British citizenship before accepting. Do they even ask for a certificate of common decency on the part of the giver? I think not. One would imagine that money from abroad to be used in this country for British movements. British purposes and British institutions was an unheard of thing, instead of being the commonest of happenings. In times of war it is customary to forbid the transmission of money to the enemy, and there is a good reason for it. But our warfare is of a different order. It is not a war of nations, it is a war of ideas, and ideas know of no national boundary. And after all, it is that war that the papers (and people I have been dealing with) dread. They know that they may survive the war of nations, they dread the consequences of a war of ideas. And like all stupid men they learn nothing from history, and experience carries with it no moral. Like a dog returning to its vomit, they, when attacked, resort to their old weapon of persecution. They know, if they know anything at all, that this weapon has, time after time, broken in the hands of those who use it. But it is the only one they have and at least it may delay, and in that delay these Micawbers of obscurantism hope that something may turn up. "They be poor things, my masters."

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### In Clover

"When you kneel in front of a priest, keep your hands in your pockets."—*Voltaire*.

"Gold will knit and break religions."—*Shakespeare*.

HAS anyone ever attempted to reckon the amount of money extorted by Christian priests from the inhabitants of this country alone? The total must run into thousands of millions of money. Tithes, "Peter's Pence," fees for christenings, marriages, and burials, and the numerous other devious sources of revenue, make a formidable list. Tithes, the "sacred tenth" extorted from farmers, has produced latterly three millions of money annually, but, prior to the Reformation, the yield was far in excess, of that amount. When the farmers revolted recently against the Sacred tax, the Church Authorities took £60,000,000 in settlement, which works out at twenty years' purchase. But the Christian priests had been collecting tithe from farmers for about fifteen centuries before they were forced to remedy a terrible injustice. There is no parallel to such a widespread racket; beside it the activities of ordinary business men seem as unimportant as children playing at shops with a handful of sweets. Yet the priestly charlatans pretend that religion has nothing to do with money, and that spiritual matters are far above such material things as account-books, ledgers, and banks.

It is a nice game played slowly, and the priests have never hurried. They collected for their particular god; but few men noticed that it was a cardinal who lived in Hampton Court Palace, an Archbishop at Lambeth Palace, with its guard-room, and a bishop at Wells, with its moat. Arrayed in the needlework of Noddledom, these priests aped, and even challenged, Royalty. In the House of Lords they held the balance of power; in education they were supreme.

With the income of a small nation, buttressed with State support, these men lorded it over England with a vengeance.

What is the result? The Anglican hierarchy is the wealthiest Church in all Christendom. Her Romish rival, with her side-shows at Lourdes and so many other places, and her faked relics, may have made more money in the past, but her power is waning, and, so far as this country is concerned, she is, despite all the noisy resources of the showman's art, of no more consequence to-day than the Salvation Army. But the so-called Church of England is still entrenched behind mountains of money-bags, and, in consequence, wields enormous power. The ancient ecclesiastical endowments are far more solid than the alleged golden streets of any "New Jerusalem," and they are not invested in bucketshop concerns. Lord Addington's Parliamentary return of 1891 showed that the annual value of these ancient endowments was £5,469,171, exclusive of modern benefactions which ran into many millions. Since that date the value of most of this Church's property has more than doubled, especially in urban areas.

Anyone who cares to consult Crockford's *Clerical Directory* can see at a glance that the average clerical "son-of-God" enjoys a comfortable existence. His salary is attractive, and, in addition, he lives in a decent house, often larger and nicer than his neighbours. He has just as much, or as little, work as he likes to do, and if he chooses to spend three-fourths of each day reading or visiting, there is no one to say him nay. He can count on invitations to dinner and other hospitality all the year round, which is no small saving on the household expenses. In the pleasant summer months he can ensure a holiday of a month, or even longer. The higher clergy evade the blessings of poverty in a highly skilful way. Forty of the saintly bishops share £182,000 yearly. The bachelor Bishop of London, who is so concerned about the "poverty" of the clergy, and who is always asserting that he has difficulty in making ends meet, starves on a salary of £200 weekly, with a palace and a town-house, which is a sufficient income to keep half a hundred working-class families in comparative comfort. Yet there are simple folks who do not see through this ecclesiastical chicanery, and who are taught to sing:—

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small,  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Can you not see the dear bishops smiling discreetly behind their lawn-sleeves at the simplicity of the ordinary man?

The Ecclesiastical Commissioners are among the biggest of big business men. They are among this country's principal landlords. Their notice boards are displayed in the wildest parts of Cumberland, they are property owners and ground landlords in some of the most crowded and least desirable streets of London, and thousands of Durham miners pay them toll on every ton of coal brought to the surface. Indeed, mineral royalties form an important part of Church of England revenues. In their latest balance-sheet Government and other securities amounted to £32,474,654, and cash assets to £34,516,233. The two together make the Anglican Church one of the biggest businesses in the country. Ironically, all this wealth has been accumulated in the name of a legendary figure, who is said to have been "sold up" for thirty pieces of silver, and whose evangel was the gospel of poverty. Even the fancy dresses of the right-reverend bishops cost £300, which is a direct contrast to the average "fifty-bob," or, maybe, seventy-five shillings of the plain citizen.



It is hardly possible to overestimate the reactionary power of this so-called Church of England. Although only a small minority of people are actual members of this religious community, it has such enormous financial resources, that, combined with State support, it has pushed itself into a position that is almost equivalent to a branch of the Civil Service. With its bishops in the House of Lords, its priests in every parish, and its grip on the schools and universities, it has truly enormous power to resist Democracy.

This Church can offer good salaries to men willing to repeat its abracadabra, and plenty of men can always be found to prostitute their intellects for a consideration. There are three hundred bishops, and two archbishops, with salaries ranging from £1,000 to £15,000 yearly, and in many cases a palace and town house thrown in. There are thousands of rectors and vicars with houses larger than their neighbours and comfortable salaries. In the heart of the City of London there are fifty churches with very small congregations, but the priests in charge get £1,000 annually, and a residence. Even in the case of curates efforts have been made latterly to ensure these young "sons-of-God" £200-£250 yearly. "It is roses all the way" for the priests.

It is merely a question of money. Disestablish and Disendow this Church of England and its power for mischief is destroyed. It would sink immediately to the level of the numerous Free Churches, and have to rely upon the offerings of the faithful for its continued existence. Instead of its vast wealth being used for the furtherance of superstition, and for supporting hordes of priests in comfort, the money could be better employed in improving national education, widening the social services, and even of lessening the ever-growing burden of taxation. At present, all these millions of money are being used to foster and encourage barbarism, and to propagate political views scarcely distinguishable from the backwoodsmen ideals of the Primrose League and Constitutional Club.

So far as England is concerned, this Black Army of Priestcraft is a serious and continuous menace. At the top are prelates with seats in the House of Lords, where they obstruct all legislation in favour of Democracy; at the bottom are a multitude of holders of benefices who do the bidding of their reactionary superiors. Few worse misfortunes can befall a nation than this of permitting a very wealthy and very powerful institution in its midst that saps the very springs of morality, that encourages mental and moral confusion, and of deliberate and set purpose, continuously hinders the wheels of Progress in the way that this so-called Church of England does. It is the sworn enemy of Democracy, and must be disestablished and disendowed, if Democracy is to survive. For this reactionary Church is opposed to the spirit of Liberty which animates the progressive peoples of the world. Priests seem never to have heard of "liberty"—"a word beside which all other words are vain."

MIMNERMUS.

This reminds me of the story of Beerholm Tree, who, when he complained of the thunder effects at a rehearsal of one of his productions—"Nero," I think,—was told that it was not stage thunder which he had heard, but the real thing.

"Yes, yes, perhaps," he replied, "but all the same, it's not good enough. In this theatre we must try and improve upon the Almighty!"

Rathmell Wilson, "Pre-War."

## A Modern Quarterly

THE number of progressive magazines which have sprung up of late is a healthy sign. Among these we may note *Left Review* in its new developments. *Fact* with its valuable monthly monograph, *The Tribune*, weekly of the left wing of the Labour Party, and now *The Modern Quarterly*.\* This last periodical supplies a long-felt want; it will publish the work of the scientific advance-guard without the concealed concern for vested interests which oppresses and distorts so many "scientific" organs. The editors, who include J. D. Bernal, P. M. S. Blackett, V. Gordon Childe, J. B. S. Haldane, H. J. Laski, H. Levy, Sir P. Chalmers Mitchell, and other important scientists, represent all that is most progressive in British science; and every Freethinker will welcome their statement of aim:—

All the technical conditions for vast advances in knowledge and in social progress seem to be present. But it is becoming increasingly apparent that in modern society these achievements are not being utilized to the full; we are accustomed to the company of war and poverty, and to the perversion of scientific discovery to ignoble and injurious ends. On the theoretical plane this irrational state of affairs is reflected as an intellectual crisis. . . . One aspect of this crisis is an increasing scepticism as to the ultimate validity of scientific thought and a growing disregard for human values. From scepticism of this kind to that mysticism which would deny the existence of a world outside the mind or the possibility of knowing anything about it is a short step. Already in the Fascist countries this tendency has reached its most extreme expression, as a national cult cynically enforced by an authoritarian state.

We believe that it is urgently necessary to combat such tendencies. We hold that the great advances in science and learning are not only contributions to our knowledge of truth, but should be put to the service of society as a whole. We wish, therefore, to contribute to a system of thought which will correspond to the real world which science analyses and in which we live.

Surely this manifesto will take an historic place in the story of British science. The contents of the first issue live well up to the editorial professions. Levy deals with *The Fallacy of Mechanism*, Bernal with *The Social Function of Science*, Needham with *Integrative Levels*, Max Black with *The Evolution of Positivism*, F. D. Klingender with the *Caprichios of Goya* and their social background, and Irich Roll with *The Decline of Liberal Economics*. Prof. Farringdon has an interesting note on ancient medicine, and the reviews are concretely to the point.

The contents are throughout informed with a high sense of responsibility and a real subtlety of analysis adequate to the demands of modern thought. I can deal here with only a few points which they raised in my mind. Black's analysis of Positivism is important. (It is significant that the similar U.S.A. magazine *Science and Society* also included at first an analysis of the Logical Positivists.) For the Logical Positivists fairly represent the best aspects of progressive bourgeois thought; on the destructive side, in their realization of the perverted nature of metaphysics, they have come close to dialectics; but by their limitations, their form of abstraction, they leave the rear open to phenomenism and therefore to the whole basis of subjective-idealism which has been the nemesis of all bourgeois philosophy. Levy's article on *Mechanism* supplements this study of the Positivists; for the dilemma of the mechanist is closely

\* Published by Lawrence & Wishart and Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 2s. 6d. an issue (1s 8d. to members of the Left Book Club.)



allied to the dilemma of the Positivist. Levy shows clearly how the mechanist, by abstracting "properties" as existing in alienable individual right, abstracted Intellect; his concept of knowledge thus implicated an Infinite Intellect capable of knowing all things in their "properties" free from accident. Levy might have gone on to make the point that the basis of mechanist materialism was thus in the last resort identical with that of Theism, which explains why the great mechanists such as Newton were so blissfully sure of their Theism. And the rigidity of the mechanist concept of "properties" has an obvious class-relation to the "sacredness" of bourgeois property.

Black does not discuss the class-basis of Positivist thought; but may we not see in the positivist trends of the last century the reflection of the progressive side of Capitalism, its industrial expansion? The active post-war developments of Logical Positivism would thus reflect the intensified but unavailing struggles of the champions of the industrial side of Capitalism against the financial. We must remember that throughout Capitalism this struggle has been going on; and it has been a conflict most importantly reflected in the sphere of ideas. Because industry and finance are inextricably blended, the conflict could never reach simple form; yet it has always persisted. Progressive Capitalist thought has always reflected the needs of the independent producer as against the engulfing financier. Indeed when this thought is urged with sufficient force and clarity it begins to merge into Socialism. For instance, Veblen. Keynes is an example of the ideologist of the productive side of Capitalism in the modern world; but because of the thickening contradictions of Monopoly-Capitalism with its Imperialist war-drive, he becomes more and more at root a fantasy-thinker despite the complex technical detail of his analysis.

Erich Roll brings out this latter point well in his essay. He demonstrates how the "innocence" of thinkers like Keynes blinds them to the effects of their theories if applied in the actual world of Imperialism. Keynes is emotionally a Liberal, and yet his theories find a contact with reality only in the Fascist state. That is the kind of contradiction which faces the non-dialectical thinker increasingly to-day. Because of the urgency of our situation the contradiction is extremely dangerous. But it is a contradiction implicit in all bourgeois thought. And this point is brought out admirably by Needham in his essay on Integrative Levels. He writes as a biochemical expert, and has much that is valuable to say of Evolution in relation to social trends; but he also goes on to analyse Herbert Spencer in some detail. He pays full tribute to the depth and sweep of Spencer's vision; but shows amusingly the contradictions into which Spencer was led by his determination to make human evolution halt at the point of Victorian middle-class development from which Spencer had himself emerged. Needham exposes fully the fallacies on which Spencer's arguments of the "social organism" were based; and here again we see the dilemma that Spencer, at heart a thorough anti-Imperialist, was clinging to a fallacious theory which under Imperialism has become one of the bed-rock dogmas of the Fascists.

Prof. Farrington, in his note on Vesalius, raises a number of interesting points in relation to the decline of science in antiquity; and though his general points are certainly sound, he unduly simplifies (perhaps for reasons of compression). For instance, the "Roman" attitude was not exactly the same after the Caesarian revolution as before it. What of Celsus, etc.? Celsus indeed represents both the good and bad tendencies. He seems to have been the "amateur of knowledge," and yet he shows a close acquaintance with surgical operations, etc., and his advice is sound, "I

am of opinion that medicine ought to admit Theory; but its curative indications should be based on the evident causes of disease. . . . Those who devote themselves to medicine cannot dispense with the dissection of the dead . . . and as to other facts only to be learned in the living, these the treatment of wounds will teach." Nothing barrenly theoretical there. Moreover, all the divergent tendencies in Greek medicine—the conflict between theory and empiricism—had already developed in the *Dogmatici*, *Empirici* and *Methodici* schools long before the Roman Empire established itself. Further it was in many ways Egyptian science that was at the root of the medical advances. The Hippocratists knew nothing of the nervous system. It was when the great Alexandrian medical school grew up and resumed both the Egyptian and Greek traditions with new force that rapid advance was made. In the Alexandrian period "medicine made real progress, largely due to the practice of dissection, which, forbidden in Greece, was practised in Egypt." (*Science in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Arnold Reymond). Also it is surely wrong to suggest that the development from Hippocrates to Galen was purely one of gain; already in Galen (working under the Antonines when resilience was going from the Roman structure) we see the growth of a medieval teleology. In short, though it was the divorce between practice and theory, consequent on a slave-economy, which finally killed ancient medicine as all other arts and sciences, yet the movement of rise and fall was a very complicated one, as was the expansion and decadence of Græco-Roman society itself.

JACK LINDSAY.

## The Codex Sinaiticus Again

### I.

THE thorough examination of this famous Biblical manuscript by the experts at the British Museum is of the greatest interest, especially to Freethinkers. It is one thing to approach the *Codex* with the eye of Faith as did its discoverer, the learned Dr. Tischendorf. It is quite another thing to look at it with the eye of an experienced palæographer anxious to discover some facts about its age and production. So long as the manuscript was "reverently" handled, so long as it was considered that its preservation was the work of "Divine Providence," so long was the truth concerning its value as a "Witness to the Word" difficult to arrive at. But directly it was handled as any other ancient manuscript would be, one could be sure of arriving at some positive information. This is exactly what has happened, as some recent articles in the *Daily Telegraph* prove beyond a doubt. We have an idea that the facts so lucidly put in that journal by Mr. T. C. Skeat, the Assistant Keeper at the Department of Manuscripts, British Museum, will not be particularly welcomed by believing Christians.

For Dr. Constantin Tischendorf, his rescue of the *Sinaiticus* from the hands of the destroying monks at the monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai was an act of God. He did not see that one might just as well have called the impending destruction of the *Codex* an Act of God. Here was a monastery full of monks devoting their lives to the worship of God and Jesus, with a library packed with ancient religious manuscripts, many, if not most of them, centuries old; yet so little was the learning of these monks, and so little "reverence" did they have for these memorials of their Faith, that they were actually burning most of them as useless lumber. The monks seemed utterly



unaware of their value. Not, indeed, till Dr. Tischendorf showed some anxiety to take some particular MSS. away with him did they suddenly awake to their—monetary—worth. And it is a good thing for Biblical criticism as a whole that the *Codex* was allowed to leave the monastery, for with the *Vaticanus* and the *Alexandrinus* it forms a valuable commentary on the gullibility of Christians with regard to their Faith.

That the *Sinaiticus* is no forgery can be accepted with assurance; all sorts of variations occur in the text which one can confidently assert no forger could be capable of. Moreover the recent expert examination of the MS. puts the matter beyond all possible doubt. One thing emerges from this examination, and that is, the writing of it was just an ordinary commercial transaction. A copy of the Bible was wanted in Greek, and it could be supplied at so much cost. There was no reverent monk devoting night and day to the holy task. There were, in fact, a number of writers taking down from dictation various parts of the *Codex*, later to be put together to form one volume; and some of the writers were unable to spell properly. The scribe called B, says Mr. Skeat, broke all records for ignorance—"The real difficulty is to understand why he could ever have been chosen for the work. Not only is he all at sea with vowels and consonants alike, but his writings are disfigured by gratuitous blunders of the crudest kind." This sort of frank criticism we do not get from Tischendorf—though he must have known the facts. This is shown by Mr. Skeat's statement that in his printed edition of the *Sinaiticus*, the famous scholar "emerges from the text with flying colours." It is "a marvel of precise and painstaking scholarship." Tischendorf supplied no fewer than 15,000 critical notes. A manuscript of God's word which had to have so many critical notes surely is an ironical comment on the way in which the text of the Bible has been transmitted.

When compared with the *Codex Vaticanus*, and the *Codex Alexandrinus*, the *Sinaiticus* offers some remarkable variations which are the despair of scholars. Moreover, these three manuscripts differ in many places from what is known as the "received" text, that is, the one on which our Authorized Version is based. The contest as to which is really God's Word is still going on, and has been going on ever since the publication of the Revised Version. It is curious to note that though the Authorized Version is always or nearly always referred to by scholars as an "imperfect" version, and for this reason they prefer to quote the Revised Version whenever "accuracy" is required, the public at large prefer the Authorized Version with all its errors—errors, by the way, not at all admitted by some fervent and orthodox critics.

The Revised Version depends a great deal on the three manuscripts already named; but it was bitterly attacked by the late Dean Burgon. Says Dr. Kenyon in his *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* :—

Dean Burgon tilted desperately against the text of Westcott and Hort (the Revised Version) and even went so far as to argue that these two documents (the *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus*) owed their preservation not to the goodness of their text, but to its depravity, having been, so to speak, pilloried as examples of what a copy of the Scripture ought not to be!

Dean Burgon would have had a good laugh at his opponents, if he were alive, had he read Mr. Skeat's comment on the writing of the *Sinaiticus* :—

There are a number of signs which suggest that the *Codex* was never finished, but was laid aside, perhaps as unsaleable; if this was really the case the unsatisfactory nature of Scribe B's work must have been one of the prime causes of the decision.

The Dean, in fact, bitterly resented any change in the text of the Bible he knew so well; and even some Freethinkers I know will quote many things from the Authorized Version given up by the Revised Version if it suits their purpose. This is particularly the case with "pious" Rationalists who, while disclaiming all the divine attributes of Jesus, show a positive reluctance to dispense with him altogether. In particular, some will quote the famous story of the Woman taken in Adultery as an example of the greatness of Jesus, and they get quite angry when it is pointed out to them that the story is not in the *Sinaiticus*, and is therefore relegated to the margin in the Revised Version. It *must* be true because it is so like Jesus—just in fact the kind of thing Jesus would do. Complete emancipation from the thralldom of Christianity is very difficult and very rare.

It is good to bear in mind that there really is no such thing as a recognized Sacred Text. There are various texts, some of which have more "authority" than others in the minds of certain "authorities." Dean Burgon never minced matters when he was stating his opinion of a text with which he disagreed. For example, of the *Sinaiticus* and the *Vaticanus* he says :—

The text has undergone apparently an habitual, if not systematic, depravation; has been manipulated throughout in a wild way. Influences have been demonstrably at work which altogether perplex the judgment. The result is simply calamitous. There are evidences of persistent mutilation, not only of words and clauses but of entire sentences.

Some of these statements have been borne out by the careful and competent examination the *Sinaiticus* has undergone in British Museum, and the reasons for them explained. There is no Divine Providence about the question either. Mistakes were made in the transcription of the text, due mostly to the incompetence of the transcriber. Corrections were made either at the time or later. Says Mr. Skeat :—

Moreover we can make a shrewd guess at the source of the corrections. In some instances, we have been able to prove that they actually existed in the very manuscript from which the *Codex* was copied, and in the absence of contrary evidence we may reasonably assume it for the remainder. This "*Codex* behind the *Codex*" we can picture as a kind of master-copy, swarming with corrections and various readings which had accumulated during years of research and comparison of different manuscripts.

Salvation seems thus to rest upon a very precarious textual foundation.

H. CUTNER.

#### GOD AND MAN

God made this world and saw that it was good,  
Then sprinkled over all the seeds of strife;  
'Twas good when brother shed his brother's blood;  
For God had made the law,—'Life lives on life!'  
Thus rogues live long, while honest men indeed  
Misunderstand the written law of God:  
Their honour surfeits surfeit-burdened greed;  
And this is law;—the written law of God!  
Oh, ye unworthy men the truth is plain,  
Our life is incomplete unless by sin  
We shape them so our brothers suffer pain,  
And blight our children's lives ere they begin.  
God willed the laws, the suffering, and the pain.  
I sometimes think man would be more humane!

H.D.



## Acid Drops

Dean Inge's *Evening Standard* articles must give his brother parsons the shivers. He is always letting out a truth that must be unpleasant to Christians—which description covers most truths. In a recent issue he says "The most astonishing thing in all ecclesiastical codes of morality is the absence of any condemnation of cruelty. Nothing shows in stronger light the greatness of the change from ecclesiastical to humanitarian ethics." Exactly, but even while letting out a truth that is so easily verified, Dr. Inge's religious training will express itself. For note, he does not say Christian codes, but ecclesiastical codes. As though the latter were not based on and born of the former. What condemnation of general cruelty is there in the New Testament? It can hardly be derived from the belief in eternal damnation? Or from St. Paul's contemptuous "Doth God care for oxen?" The hatred of cruelty in general is born of modern heresy. Christianity gave the world a hatred of disbelief, the rack as an instrument of religious conversion, and persecution as a manifestation of love of God.

Fact often conflicts with theory. Here is an example. Theoretically the Bishops of the Church of England are "called" to their post by God. Actually, as everyone knows, they are appointed by the Prime Minister, who naturally considers the value of the Bishop to his political party. The possible explanation is that God moves the P.M. to select the proper man. Now Lord Hugh points out that the present Prime Minister is a Unitarian, who, a few centuries ago, might have been used to light up Smithfield. So Lord Hugh thinks it quite improper that a Unitarian shall say who shall be a bishop in the Established Church, and he suggests that the power of appointment shall be taken out of the hands of the P.M. He also wishes the Archbishops and Bishops to be taken out of the House of Lords, where he says they are more harmed by the House than they do good to it.

We agree with all these things. We do not think the P.M. should have the right to appoint bishops, nor do we think they should be in the House of Lords. But this is all part of the Establishment, and we wonder whether Lord Hugh Cecil would be in favour of the disestablishment of the Church. We fancy not. In that case he wishes to pick the plums and take none of the responsibility for the growth of the tree. Moreover the House of Commons has its chaplain, and, it has its religious performances, and it maintains the blasphemy laws, as well as enforcing, so far as it can, an observance of the Sabbath. Permit parliament to do any of these things, and there is no logical reason why the P.M. should not appoint Bishops. Almost anyone or anything will do for a Bishop nowadays, and if a man is given power to choose other officials he may well be trusted to select a Bishop—so long as we are troubled with this primitive survival. If the power of selection was vested in the King, one cannot well credit George VI. with a wisdom that is greater than an ordinary politician, and in practice the King would do as he is directed in this, as he does in any other matter of importance.

Pastor Weatherhead is given a full page "puff" in a Sunday paper by the also much-advertised author of *For Sinners Only*, A. J. Russell, and in spite of the pastor having told Russell that "he did not like being written about!" But the latter "knew his man," and duly listened while the "religious-psychologist" "said a monthful." Cases of wonderful "healing" did the pastor cite, but not a single one which indicated the intervention of a "power" other than a simple human understanding of common human weaknesses. Whitefield's Tabernacle is now proceeding on the same lines as the City Temple, and we may witness the laity protesting against these encroachments on the work of better-qualified secular practitioners.

"It would," says the *Observer*, "be in the highest degree disloyal to pass by Cruft's show without notice, seeing that His Majesty's Labrador retriever, Sandring-

ham Stream, was among the prize winners." We are now waiting notice of the manner in which the King's chauffeur blows his nose, and an account of the democratic manner in which the Queen's favourite cat walks across the room.

Probably it is because of the influence of this Labrador that Mr. Ivor Brown writes in the same issue, that "the sweep of the great broad road from the Angel 'is' inevitably a bit or rural London." We pass this point very frequently, but must confess it never struck us as remarkably rural. The utterly disloyal attitude of Mr. Brown deserves the most severe reprobation. He actually mentions Cruft's show without paying attention to the King's dog! This must be by orders direct from Moscow.

Another eminent man is claimed—after his death—to have been some sort of Christian, on the flimsiest of evidence. Sir Henry Irving was born a century ago, of Methodist parentage. The evidence apparently consists of an anecdote told by Sir Martin Harvey to the effect that Irving once said: "If ever I prayed in my life, it was the night before I played Hamlet." For all his Methodist upbringing the *Christian World* agrees that "he never gave any hint in later years of these early church associations."

We are not surprised to learn that Christianity has greatly strengthened its influence in Japan in recent years. Father Leo Ward describes at length the popularity of "Jochi Daigaku"—the Catholic University of Tokio, which is under the direct government support, and is conducted by German and Japanese Jesuits. Apart from this centre of Catholic power the Catholic influences are considerable in so-called "Secular" educational institutions including the "Athene," the "Maison Franco-Japonaise," and the Imperial Universities. Having regard to the behaviour of Japan in China, we have no reason to doubt Father Ward's belief that:—

The Catholic University in Tokio holds a key position in that missionary field, for (as many of us hold) a Christian Japan will some day be the key to a Christian Asia.

Dr. Lyttleton, in a communication to a religious paper, is very disturbed at the way that "a huge number of Churchmen are living in disobedience to the Sermon on the Mount, in respect of Prayer, and Almsgiving." He finds that seven children out of ten of the upper professional classes "have never been taught to say a prayer." We hope the doctor is right, for if he is, it shows that at last we are reaching some level of sanity. Dr. Lyttleton can find no evidence for Fasting—which also is a very good sign. As for Almsgiving, it seems that people are spending something like £150,000,000 per annum on tobacco when they might have been giving this money away in alms, or in missions, or spending it on the Church. This is really too bad; and if our satisfaction in smoking really ends in smoke, at least we feel we have been helping not a few people to earn at the same time an honest living—and one far, far honester, than trying to convert numbers of "natives" into yellow or dubious Christians.

Politicians and others who are seeking to discover and eliminate the drawbacks to domestic service will have no cause to welcome the move by "united" churchmen to revive family prayers. Victorian employers, of course, used to demand, with rampant impertinence, the attendance of their household staffs at morning prayers (sometimes accompanied by a homily or a Bible reading) quite regardless of the staffs' religious or non-religious inclinations. The initiation of modern servants to their masters' or mistresses' inner holiness would be a scene worth observing. Just imagine Lord Howitzer, Sir Dunham Sharpe, the Dowager Lady Spitfire, and such notabilities commanding the household to ask a blessing on their respective social and economic ramps, and to beseech their "Lord" to give them all humble and contrite hearts—especially the "domestics." Well—it was done,



it is *being* done, and will continue to be done while hypocrisy flourishes. But the modern "Jeames" and "Marys" are likely to substitute an "Oh, yeah?" for an Amen, and a "Sez you!" to master's or mistress's petitions for their "spiritual" welfare.

The Rev. Gilderoy Davison, of St. Peters-in-the-Field, Bocking, begs of the people of Bocking and Braintree to prevent the opening of cinemas in these places. Mr. Davison says that if things go on as they are going there will be no Sunday left. We presume that the week will go on till Saturday and then start right off with Monday. Nothing else of a serious character is likely to happen—except that the next generation may grow up cleaner-minded and better-brained than they are at present. Oh, we almost forgot—the Rev. Gilderoy Davison may lose his job.

The Rev. F. E. Wilkinson is also alarmed at the outlook for religion. He says that seventy per cent of the people are out of touch with any form of religious worship. So the Eastbourne people are asked to be up and doing. But what has the Lord been doing to permit such a loss? Are there no thunderbolts left in heaven? After all, if the Lord is unconcerned about the matter, Mr. Davison and Mr. Wilkinson might well take things calmly.

Taking advantage of the booming of the Bible that is now going on, we note that "eight handsome quarto volumes of sermons by the great fundamentalist, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, are now being advertised as "an amazing commentary on the whole Bible." We agree with the description of the 7,000 pages as a commentary on the whole Bible, but why amazing? Spurgeon was a great preacher, but with a view of the Bible and Christianity that hardly any educated Christian preacher today would endorse. He believed in the literal truth of the Bible, in the existence of a literal hell, and in unbelief as being the greatest of crimes. Even in the later portion of his own life Spurgeon's *Christian* followers was made up of the most ignorant and uncultured of Christian believers. He did tell the truth about the Bible, and the truth about Christianity. It is that which has put him out of date. It is not the fashion to tell the truth about Christianity—in the pulpit. It is only in papers such as the *Freethinker* that the Christian can get it, and then it is, to the majority of educated and professed Christians, so monstrous that it is at once put down as falsity or a caricature. To these we say, read Spurgeon. They will then see what "true Christianity" was.

We read in the *News-Chronicle* that the congregation of All Saints, Wimbledon, is asked by the vicar to pray for Burglars! As the church named has twice recently been the scene of a successful burglary, we might assume that at least SOME prayers are answered—in this case apparently answered in advance. "Before they call, I will answer, saith the Lord." It is a fact, however, that many so-called "prayers" are merely Curses—like Dr. Joseph Parker's: "God Damn the Sultan." We imagine that these Wimbledon Burglars will be afraid that the congregation rather conceitedly calling themselves "All Saints" will in future "warn and Pray."

Isham, Northants, Football Club is closing down because its members, lads of the village, don't support the Bible Class of Miss Jessie Dunkley, of Home Farm. Jessie, who is now only 25 years of age, founded the club two years ago in connexion with her Bible Class, and told a pressman that she "had so hoped the combination of the two would lead to cleaner sport. It started well, but the Bible interest diminished as the football interest grew. And that wasn't my idea at all." So this young lass has failed. She is now anticipating "dirtier sport" we presume. She should submit her ideas of "clean sport" to the F.A. or other football authorities whose concern it is. Then we may see referees with a whistle in one hand and a Bible in the other. A short Bible reading may precede the kick-off if preferred, and a verse from a hymn may preface the taking of a penalty-kick.

A remarkable poem appeared in the *Star* of February 5, entitled *Night Covers Barcelona*, by James Holly. It describes "the meditations of 'A Great Christian Gentleman,' during one of his Sunday morning bombings." The "gentleman" is Franco, and the verse opens thus:—

"Here a great Christian gentleman I stand,  
Lord, meekly heaving up my either hand:  
Reeking, rapacious, reddened though they be,  
Yet happily I lift them up to Thee."

Father W. Pitts, of Littlehampton Roman Catholic Church, has issued a notice that if confetti is thrown at weddings the bridesmaids will have to stay behind and sweep up the mess. We wonder how Father Pitts will enforce this rule. Will he unmarry the couple if his order is not obeyed? But we see that rice is permitted, because, says the priest, it is the symbol of fecundity. So are a number of the symbols in the Church, but this information would not be politic. But why allow a symbol of fecundity? Consider the symbolism of this celibate priest!

Dr. Pythian-Adams, in his *The Fullness of Israel*, proves himself one of those incurable "die-hards," who are the despair of pious critics. He believes that the Patriarchs were real individuals, and he believes that the plagues of Egypt were real plagues. "But for the broad facts of early Biblical history," says a religious reviewer, "as distinct from the varieties of their literary presentation, he claims an accuracy greater than the present literary tradition would concede." Or to put it another way the "broad facts" are really not broad facts. What then are they?

### [Fifty Years Ago

CENTURIES ago, when the earth was thought to be flat, hell was conceived as a lake of fire below its surface. This idea is still entertained by myriads of ignorant people, many of whom find a proof of their belief in the fact that the temperature rises as we dig deeper and deeper into the earth's crust. Volcanoes like Etna, Vesuvius, and Heckla were believed to be vent-holes or even mouths of hell. Sir John Mandeville, the legendary traveller of the Middle Ages, declares that he found a descent into hell "in a perilous vale" in the land of Prester John. Many a cavern in England still bears the name of Hell-hole. Another cavern on an island is one of the south Irish lakes is said to open down into hell. It is called St. Patrick's Purgatory. Crowds of Pilgrims visited it for several centuries, and all who had the hardihood to venture in were pinched, beaten, and burned, probably by priests who played the parts of devils in order to sustain the profitable delusion. Dr. Faber, so recently as 1851, taught that the interior of the earth would at least be the locality of hell during the millenium. When the saints had risen in the sky at the sound of the archangel's trumpet, the earth would be accommodated for the new era. Gehenna would consist of a solid sphere of fire, two thousand miles in diameter; outside this there would be an ocean of liquid fire two thousand miles deep, where the damned would be nicely cooked; and beyond this a vast spherical arch, one thousand miles thick, upon which the saints would live in glory and felicity with Christ. This idea does credit to Faber's imagination, but the learned divine forgot to tell us how the saints could enjoy themselves while walking on the lid of the great pot in which their late fellow creatures were being boiled.

Such notions are nearly exploded nowadays, yet people still speak of hell as *down*, just as they speak of heaven as *up*. If a Christian refers to the paradise of his faith he still looks at the sky, while if he refers to Hades he casts his eyes upon the ground. Heaven is-to-day as of old in the region of life and light, and hell in the region of death and darkness. We imitate our forefathers without knowing why, and what they did in consonance with their belief we do for no other reason than that it is the fashion.

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# THE FREETHINKER

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

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A. H. STONE.—Thanks for cuttings.

BAYARD SIMMONS.—Many thanks for offer. Will bear it in mind. We are always pleased to receive items from foreign papers which may prove of interest to our readers.

R. MONAGHAN.—Thanks for magazine. We have, naturally, a sympathetic side towards heresy of any sort. Even when it embraces an error it is more useful than an unthinking conformity.

L. U. COLLIN.—Sorry, but we do not know where the paper you name is published.

W. J. LAMB.—Thanks for letter. As you say it proves that one's work for Freethought brings results in many unexpected, or at least unknown places. If only the young generation of the present could be transported back for a season to the life of about sixty or seventy years ago, they would recognize how much they are indebted to the Freethought movement.

D. FISHER.—We do not see any contradiction in the passage cited from *Determinism or Free-Will*. It asserts that character is a product of circumstance, and that the sum of a man's experiences, which include his heredity, individual and social, finds expression in his character. Your unknown commentator may have had something in mind that was not expressed in his note.

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## Sugar Plums

Today (February 20) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Cosmo Debating Society, Nottingham. The meeting opens at 2.30. This will enable friends from a distance to arrive home again in the early evening. The meeting place is the University Hall, Shakespeare Street.

On the back page of this issue will be found an advertisement of a fourth volume of Mr. Cohen's *Essays in Freethinking*. The volume, in common with the preceding three, covers a wide range of subjects, all of which are of more than passing interest. We specially commend the one on Mr. Bernard Shaw and the N.S.S., because it covers a page of history that is likely to be either ignored or distorted by Mr. Shaw's biographers. The reader will find a lengthy letter from Mr. Shaw, in which he attempts a defence of his assertion that on Bradlaugh's death he was invited to lecture before the N.S.S. with a view to his being invited to accept the presidency of the Society. Mr. Shaw defends his assertion in a lengthy letter, and Mr. Cohen replies—we think, effectively. The four volumes, which will be sent post free 10s., would make a very good present to a reading friend, whether Christian or Freethinker.

Yet another case of insolence on the part of a magistrate with regard to the Affirmation. A girl of 13 was called as a witness at Greenwich Police Court on January 29 in relation to a case of dangerous driving. When asked to take the oath she quite properly asked to affirm.

The magistrate, shocked, said, "Do you mean to say that you do not believe in the creator of the universe?" and having relieved himself of this gratuitous and ponderous nonsense, asked the father to step forward. After listening to the father, for whose intelligence and respectability we are able to vouch, the magistrate impudently said to the girl, "I am sorry for you" (whether for the girl or the parent is not quite clear). But the girl's evidence was clearly and intelligently given.

Now this kind of case is constantly occurring, and once more we think it high time that the Lord Chancellor (we fancy he has the power to do so), should call these men to order. It is their place to administer the law justly, and not to make their presence on the bench ventilate either their general ignorance, or their contempt for the rights of witnesses. If the father of the girl had risked giving the magistrate a good jacketing the magistrate would richly have deserved what he got. To be guilty of contempt of court in such circumstances is to make the punishment fit the crime.

We are pleased to see in several of the North of England papers, the following from the North Eastern Federation of Branches of the National Secular Society:—

This Federation wishes to draw the attention of your Council to certain inconsistencies in rating assessments in the North of England.

The rating laws of this country at present permit buildings which are used exclusively for religious purposes to be granted exemption from rates, and for their share to be paid by the other residents of the district.

This subsidy is in itself unfair, but we have found that so elastic an interpretation is being placed upon this exemption clause that not only are invidious distinctions being made but violations of the rating laws are being permitted.

There is, for instance, in Sunderland, a hall, owned by a religious sect, and exempt from rates, in which a furniture exhibition was recently held. Our investigations in South Shields disclosed a grave lack of uniformity in the assessment of halls, institutes, etc. Some are assessed, some are not. One religiously-owned hall which pays no rates extorts from the Council a fee for hire of the hall. On the other hand, a miners' trade union hall has an assessment ten times greater than the average assessment of halls.

This Federation is arranging for an inspection of the rating records of all districts in the North-East, but in the meantime kindly direct the attention of your Council to this matter.

A protest is being sent to the Minister of Health, while a question is to be asked in the House of Commons. May I urge all your readers to decrease their own rates by insisting on all buildings in their area being properly assessed?—Yours etc.,

J. WALTON, *Secretary*,  
North-East Federation of Branches,  
National Secular Society.

The Liverpool Branch N.S.S. are holding an informal Dinner and Social (their fifth) at the St. George's Restaurant, 5 Redcross Street, Liverpool, on Saturday, February 19, at 7.30 p.m. Reception is at 7 p.m., and it is expected that Mr. Rosetti will be present.

Liverpool saints are reminded that Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture in the Picton Hall this evening (February 20) on behalf of the local N.S.S. Branch at 7 p.m. The subject, "A Search for God" provides a suitable occasion for the introduction of orthodox friends, which is always a very useful part of our work. Admission is free, with some reserved seats at one shilling each.

To-day (February 20) a Debate will take place at the West London Branch Meeting-place, Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W., at 7.30 p.m. Mr. George Bedborough will open affirming "That Prayer to God is Futile." He will be opposed by the Rev. Father Dunston Pontifex, O.S.B., a very capable Roman Catholic priest, who is well-known at London Branches, where he has already debated with N.S.S. lecturers. We believe that both sides will be well represented, and we advise those who wish to get a seat to be there in good time.



## Law and Government in Saxon England

In his *Germania*, Tacitus described the ancient assembly of our Teutonic forefathers as it existed on the Continent in Roman days. This primitive council was destined to develop into our modern system of Parliamentary Government.

Wide differences of opinion have been expressed concerning the constitution of the Witanagemot or Meeting of the Wise. Still, it is now conceded that in the local *gemots* every freeman was entitled to attend. In the *gemot* of his residential mark, which became in England the parish vestry—every freeman possessed the right of oral expression. Thus, at least in theory, every freeman had a voice in the folk-moot, the shire-moot or county court of succeeding centuries. Some authorities have claimed that every freeman, whether corl or ceorl, had also the right to attend the National Assembly, but whatever may have been the custom in early times the Witan was later placed under aristocratic control. Stubbs contends that the central authority was never modelled on the lower courts, the ordinary freeman never exercising more than local authority. Nevertheless, the theory of government was democratic in the sense that the Supreme Council of the Nation, the Witan, "represented the whole people, whose rights, as against the King, were all vested in the assembly."

The aristocratic character of this ancient legislature is plainly disclosed by its composition. Its members—bishops, ealdormen, a number of the king's friends and retainers and generally the *sapientes* or wise men and *principes*, all of which denote affluence and influence. The attendance at the Witan was never large. Kemble conducted a painstaking study of the question and he states that in the ancient documents he consulted the largest number of signatures he met with was 106, "but numbers varying from 80 to 100 are not uncommon, especially after the consolidation of the monarchy. In earlier times, and smaller kingdoms, the numbers must have been much less." Still, in periods of excitement, other gatherings such as conventions, accompanied by military display, appear to have been far more imposing as well as tumultuary. Kemble compares these with "the ancient armed folk-moot on the famous day that put an end to the Meringovian dynasty among the Franks. Such, perhaps, was the *gemot* which, after Edmund Ironside's death, elected Canute sole King of England, or that in which Earl Godwine and his family were outlawed."

Never a representative body in the modern sense, yet the Witanagemot's powers were as extensive as those of a modern legislature. It sometimes exercised its power to depose a king who misgoverned. In the turbulent north kings were removed on an extensive scale. Dr. Stubbs in his *Constitutional History* notes that of the 15 kings of Northumbria in the eighth century, 13 came to an inglorious end, but two only appear to have been driven by the Witan to vacate their thrones. In the more civilized West Saxon kingdom, three monarchs were deposed by the Witan prior to the Norman Conquest. The National Parliament established in the time of Henry III., deposed his grandson Edward II., in 1327; Richard II. in 1399 and James II. in 1688. What actually occurred in the case of Edward VIII., has not yet been made public. It is sometimes said that Henry VI. was deposed when, in reality, he was set aside by partisans of the House of York. Nor was Charles I. deposed, but brought to trial and executed *being king*.

The Saxon monarchy was not strictly hereditary, but elective. In truth, every ruler in the ancient

Teutonic Kingdoms was nominally subject to election. Yet, there was always a royal family and the Witan was restricted to the selection of the most powerful personality of that family as the man best qualified to officiate as ruler. As a general rule, the eldest son succeeded his father the only bar to succession being obvious incapacity. In the turbulent times then prevailing the military ability of the king proved of primary importance and minors were unceremoniously thrust aside to give place to a member of the reigning house of maturer age and experience. Æthelred I. was chosen in preference to the sons of his elder brother, the dead king. And when Æthelred himself departed leaving young children, his brother Alfred succeeded him. Edward the Elder's legitimate offspring were still youthful at their father's death when, although reputedly a bastard, Athelstan was elected king. Other instances of this kind are recorded, and in the case of Harold, the last Saxon King, the entire royal line was ignored and the ablest statesman and military commander in the country raised to the throne.

Still, an advantage accrued to sons born after their father's accession. These were "sons born in the purple." The royal recommendation also carried weight as in the recommendation of Earl Harold by Edward the Confessor. This custom was carried to its logical conclusion in the sixteenth century, when Henry VIII., in his will, devised the crown successively to his son Edward and his daughters Mary and Elizabeth who, curiously enough, reigned in the order named.

The Witan's legislative and administrative powers were remarkably comprehensive. Conjointly with the king the Witan made laws, levied taxes, formed alliances and ratified peace treaties. It conferred landed estate and raised the military and naval forces deemed essential. This dual authority also appointed and deposed the bishops and other leading officials, both in Church and State. Prof. Langmead notes that the Witan likewise "adjudged the lands of offenders and intestates dying without heirs to be forfeit to the king; and authorized the enforcement of ecclesiastical decrees. Lastly, the Witan acted from time to time as a Supreme Court of Justice, both in civil and criminal causes."

Despite these extensive powers the Witan's authority was variable. Under a weak ruler it exercised great sway, but when able and active monarchs such as Alfred reigned, the Crown was practically supreme. Indeed, as the Saxon period drew to its close much of the authority previously shared between king and council was reserved to the ruler alone. The Witan, however, retained its right to assent to extraordinary taxation, and to give counsel and consent when legislation was projected or effected.

The right of trial in local courts constituted on popular principles was a primary feature in Saxon jurisprudence. This system was regarded as a guarantee of justice as it permitted the presence of neighbours likely to be absent if trials took place at a distance before a strange tribunal.

The obligation of producing a law-breaker originally fell upon the malefactor's kindred and community. At a later time this responsibility rested upon voluntary associations termed *guilds*, while this custom was in turn succeeded by the tithing which was itself superseded, apparently just prior to the Norman invasion, by the frank-pledge. Under this curious system a group of ten men constituted a permanent collective bail for the surrenderer of any member of their group when required to answer to a charge in a court of law. In the words of Langmead: "If an accused member appeared, and was condemned, he had to make reparation by his own property or by personal punishment, but if he fled from justice, the



other members of the tithing in default of exculpating themselves from all share in his crime or escape, were pecuniarily liable for the penalty."

The Hundred and the Shire were the principal local courts. In early days the entire body of freeholders were the judges, but it became more convenient to delegate the judicial office to a committee of twelve or some multiple of twelve. The Hundred exercised both criminal and civil jurisdiction and litigants were compelled to seek a remedy in this court before appealing to a higher tribunal.

In earlier times certain districts were detached from the jurisdiction of the Hundred, and placed under the *sozn* of the Church. An extensive jurisdiction was sometimes granted by the Crown to churches or favoured individuals. In this way, the Hundred's authority was weakened, and legal administration materially passed from national or royal jurisdiction to that of territorial and feudal magnates.

The Saxon shiremoot—the County Court of Norman times—was convened by the sheriff twice annually. The shiremoot's jurisdiction covered every kind of suit, save those involving high officers of State or other important personages which came under the immediate cognisance of the Crown. After the Conquest the shiremoot declined in authority when the king's itinerant judges appeared on the scene, but it long continued to exercise a large civic jurisdiction in small causes. Hallam averred that it served as an instrument in the defence of popular liberties against the encroachments of the feudal barons.

Trial by jury then meant something widely different from its meaning to-day. Save in certain civil suits, the facts of a case were elicited either by compurgation or by means of ordeal. In the former, the accused might prove his innocence by his own oath supported by the sworn testimony of compurgators, usually twelve in number, and supplemented by the oaths of his relatives and friends as to the accused's well known trustworthiness. In fact, the compurgators were witnesses to character. But the value of an oath varied with a witness's worldly possessions, and the oath of a thegn was equal to that of a dozen *ceorls* (churls). Moreover, when the accused was subject to a lord who swore in his favour, this was tantamount to an acquittal, but if a superior's oath went against him "the accused vassal was bound either to produce a triple number of compurgators or to undergo the ordeal."

When a malefactor was caught red-handed, or when he betrayed plain evidences of guilt, compurgation was forbidden. Nor was compurgation permitted when the accused had previously committed perjury, or if he was not a freeman, save only when his lord was willing to furnish his sworn belief in the accused's innocence.

The ordeal—the judgment of God—assumed three forms. These were hot or cold water, the accursed morsel, and hot iron. The accursed morsel and iron tests were conducted in a sacred building under priestly supervision. Probably, the few who escaped death did so through official connivance. In any case, the ordeal was to the pious a solemn appeal to divine judgment and that the deity would disclose the truth to the light of day was a popular assumption.

Such were salient legal proceedings in long past centuries, and even to-day our legal forms and proceedings preserve the impress of their lowly origin. The laws of England themselves reveal an unbroken series from the codes of Ethelbert in the seventh century to the present day. Unwritten customs became embodied in written laws which grew more and more essential to the requirements of a centralized and elaborated State structure.

T. F. PALMER.

## The Doctrine of Accommodation

### I.

IN England, at the moment, we are witnessing not so much the birth as the consecration of the Doctrine of Accommodation.

We have been made a free present of it by the Commission of the Anglican Church which set out fifteen years ago to find a basis of agreement on doctrinal differences, and have now presented the nation with an amazing document they call their "unanimous report." The Commission have certainly found a basis for agreement. But it is not agreement on the doctrines they have been examining—that would have been nothing short of a miracle; and, as the Commission tell us, some of them don't believe in miracles.

But the Commission have reached agreement—on the fact that they differ. Its members have agreed that on most of the points at issue they cannot agree at all.

Naturally it could not be left there. Something better than that had to be done to save the face of the Church; so we get the "unanimous agreement" on accommodation—agreement on how far doctrines can be stretched and still live; how many types of belief and believer can be accommodated in the same set of words; how far fundamental differences of belief can be accommodated as "mental reservations" without getting too dangerously—or too obviously—close to dishonesty and hypocrisy.

In certain circles there is a pleasant pastime in which the gullible are invited to "find the lady." The optimistic victims, hoping to get a good return for their money, rarely understand that the persistent failure of the "lady" to be found at points they select for her appearance is due less to her personal modesty than to the way the cards are manipulated.

The Church plays a rather similar game, only in place of a pack of cards it uses a pack of—well, the Christian Bible. It shouts good odds, claiming to have God's own revelation, and to be the source of all truth, wisdom and morality; so it receives much in the way of wealth and privilege from an optimistic public. And when the gullible are unreasonable enough to want to know exactly what value they are getting for the money they lay out, the Church puts on its "all good fellows together" smile, shuffles the pack, and bids them, "Come on, gents, find the lady." Although in this case, as the clergy have never had any truck with such nonsense as sex equality, it is a question of "finding the gentleman." The sequel is the same in both cases—the gentleman proves as elusive as the member of the other sex. The result is the same in both cases—the victims go on being victims.

Now the Anglican Commission on Christian Doctrine has brought the game right up to date; so let us be mugs for once and see if we can "find the lady."

At the outset, however, let us note that there is one point on which the Commission are not only unanimous but emphatic in their agreement—the need for the Church. (Though one may suggest this should rather be stated—the need of the Church.)

Neither agreement nor unanimity is surprising; disagreement on such a point by such a body would have been another miracle. Belief in the need for the Church is not a doctrine open to what a pious observer calls the "wide liberty of statement and of interpretation which has always been the glory of the Anglican communion"; belief in the need for the Church is, for the Church, a dogma of self-preservation.

Nevertheless, the Church that enjoys the confidence of the Anglican God has received no instruction from



him that "any one particular form of the episcopate is necessary"; nor, apparently, has it received any special tip from God regarding the future form of the Church. So, as long as you agree that the Church of England "is still bound to resist the claims" of the Church that enjoys the confidence of the Roman Catholic God, you can be accommodated if you

look forward to a reunion of Christendom having its centre in a Primacy such as might be found in a Papacy which had renounced certain of its present claims;

or if you

on the other hand, look forward to union by a more federal type of constitution which would have no need for such a Primacy.

Again, there is "agreement" on the "historical resurrection of Christ" as "the central truth of Christianity." And accompanying it, a shocking admission—that although the Church accepts the resurrection as historically true, it can neither explain it nor agree on how far it is historically true. The best the Commission can do after meeting for fifteen years under the invisible chairmanship of Almighty God himself, is to tell us that "it ought to be affirmed that Jesus was veritably alive and victorious; that He showed Himself, alive from the dead . . . and that the fact of His rising, however explained, is to be understood to have been an event as real and concrete as the crucifixion itself (which it reversed) and an act of God, wholly unique in human history." However explained!

A Church that claims to be the mouthpiece and repository and direct agent of God, and has Jesus Christ in its pocket, has to stretch mental and moral accommodation so far on the very doctrine on which it is based, that in the words of even a favourable commentator, the Commission "is content to give all the arguments on all sides and merely add:—

Enough has been said to indicate the variety of considerations to be introduced, and the necessity for critical caution to be observed, when the facts underlying the original tradition of Christ's resurrection are the subject of inquiry. Such complications of the discussion are inevitable. For to Christians the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central fact in human history. And when a fact is so closely linked with such momentous and far-reaching issues in heaven and earth, it is not surprising that opinions should differ when the question is raised how much in the record of it is derived from the sheer occurrence of the fact itself, and how much is due to the primitive interpretation of the fact in minds which first perceived its transcendent significance and expressed it in forms inevitably belonging to their own manner of thought and speech.

The most important thing that has ever happened; the central fact in human history; the incarnation, murder, and physical resurrection of God Almighty himself; an inspired record to tell us about it; an inspired Church to interpret the inspired record of God's self-revelation in the right way—and that's the net result! The inspired Church hasn't the foggiest notion how much of the inspired record it is inspired to accept.

If the resurrection is "the central fact in human history," and cannot be doubted as a reality, and if the Church is really the mouthpiece and repository of God, it is surprising "that opinions should differ." What is not surprising is that the Commission should have to descend to such inconsequential nonsense in order to hide the fact that even its own members cannot really agree on the "central fact in human history," and that despite all its power and pretence God's Church does not know a single thing more

about this "central fact in human history" than the fact that it is a belief which is essential to the Church as a business concern and which, "however explained, ought to be affirmed as true."

On the Bible, miracles, and spirits, the Doctrine of Accommodation comes into its own with a vengeance. Aspects of these have already been dealt with in these columns, but it is worth while running over a few points in order to watch the Commission at work, and to appreciate in its true light the degree of mental honesty in a statement such as made by one of its members, Dr. W. R. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, that the report "is not a compromise arrived at by a process of give and take, but the expression of a common mind."

With no acknowledgment to Freethought propaganda, infallibility of the Bible is shamelessly dropped; "the tradition of the inerrancy of the Bible cannot be maintained in the light of the knowledge now at our disposal."

However,

The Bible is unique, as being the inspired record of a unique revelation.

But,

In accepting the teaching of Christ we must remember that: (1) The actual teaching was conditioned by the circumstances of the time; (2) The record does not always represent the very words of our Lord. . . . Christian thinkers are not necessarily bound to the thought-forms employed by the Biblical writers.

Nevertheless,

The religious and moral teaching of the Gospels conveys faithfully the impress made upon the Apostolic Church by the mind and personality of Jesus, and thus possesses supreme authority.

But,

The authority ascribed to the Bible must not be interpreted as prejudging the conclusions of historical, critical, and scientific investigation in any field, not excluding that of the Biblical documents themselves.

And if an Anglican cannot twist the Bible to any purpose under the sun after that, then he doesn't deserve to be a Christian and go to heaven. (Incidentally, if he does get to heaven, he might do the Commission a good turn by letting them know where it is, because that's another point on which they are flummoxed. They know where it isn't—it isn't up in the sky. But apart from that they have to admit that all the millions of the blessed are in the category known in police bulletins as "present whereabouts unknown.")

The report would also have been more interesting if the Commission could have told us why God didn't either delay the inspiring of his unique record of his unique revelation until men could understand it better "in the light of the knowledge now at our disposal"; or, alternatively, issue it in serial form so as to give everybody a chance.

And talking about heaven, what about angels and demons? Should an Anglican believe in them? Here is the Commission's "expression of a common mind":—

To believe positively—whether on the ground of Scripture or on the ground of tradition as interpreting Scripture, and as lending weight to an inherent probability—in the existence of spiritual beings other than human, is in no way irrational.

But,

It is legitimate for a Christian either to suspend judgment on the point, or, alternatively, to interpret



the language whether of Scripture or of the Church's liturgy, with regard to angels and demons, in a purely symbolic sense.

In other words, you can:—

- (a) Believe in actual angels and demons;
- (b) Not believe in actual angels and demons;
- (c) Believe in believing either one or the other;
- (d) Believe in not believing either one or the other.

That should not tax anyone's mental honesty.

RONALD STANDFAST.

### Chance

A COMMON dodge of Christians in their futile attempts to deny the truth of evolution is to suggest that it is ridiculous to think that such a wonderful thing as an intelligent human being with a sense of right and wrong, an immortal soul, and all that sort of thing, can have come about or evolved by chance. Huxley once observed that only parsons believe in chance; but he might have added that there are thousands, if not millions, of these chancers throughout Christendom—people who are determined to believe in God and Christianity at all cost, and have got their belief stored in the "logic proof compartment" of the brain; people who have the clerical mind as opposed to the scientific mind. These will use the "chance" argument and imagine it to be a bull point.

Believing that anything in the universe has come about by chance, or acts by chance, from the falling of an unsupported stone to the ground to the loftiest transports of a "divine" conscience, simply shows an ignorance of the scientific conception of evolution, and that the universe and the atoms composing it are governed by law.

In the strictly scientific sense nothing can happen or ever has happened by chance. Chance is only a human conception of something which took place, of which the conditioning circumstances were unknown, and therefore could not have been foreseen by a maggot or even a human being. If a man goes out of his house and a brick falls upon his head, we call it chance or accident. In reality it is not chance at all as far as the laws of nature are concerned. Had the man been possessed of sufficient knowledge, he would have known that the brick was poised insecurely in a certain position, and that it would fall at a certain time, and he would have kept out of the way. Every living thing is in the same position with regard to chance as that man. We know a certain limited amount and avoid taking certain chances. If we knew everything we might avoid all accidents. The course of nature, the cosmic process, goes on, however. The more we know of natural laws the more we can turn this knowledge to our advantage. But we cannot alter the general course of the world in evolution. Believing in "chance" is denying the universality of the laws of causation; the juggling with inevitable fate; the ignoring of the principles of determinism.

Y.C.

### MORALITY

Keeping up appearances in this world, or becoming suddenly devout when we imagine that we may be shortly summoned to appear in the next.

Horace Smith: "The Tin Trumpet."

The torpidity on the side of religion of the vigorous English understanding shows how much wit and folly can agree in one brain. Their religion is a quotation; their church is a doll; and any examination is interdicted with screams of terror. In good company you expect them to laugh at the fanaticism of the vulgar; but they do not; they are the vulgar.

Emerson—"English Traits."

## Correspondence

### RUSSIA

#### TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—It is flattering that Mr. English should appear to confer on me the official title of Defender of the Soviet Union. I have not yet read Mr. Lyons' book, but a friend of mine, who has much direct knowledge of the U.S.S.R., refers in a letter of a few days back to the "petty-mindedness and stupidity" shown in that book. But if Mr. English wants denigration of the U.S.S.R., I can put him on to better men than Mr. Lyons. What about the author of *I Was a Soviet Worker*, which is so widely distributed by our big employers (earnest in the abstract search of truth, no doubt)? That exposé of the horrors of the U.S.S.R. happened to write letters to his acquaintances in the U.S.A. during his early years in the U.S.S.R., in which he said the direct opposite of what he says in his book. (They have been published in the *New York Daily Worker*.) But that, of course, was before he was ejected from the Communist Party for gross incompetence and malingering. It was only after that ejection that he found it necessary in the sacred cause of truth to sell his denunciatory articles to Hearst (also a notable seeker for truth).

Or what about the obscure Frenchman who has been serialized in the *Telegraph*? He draws a hair-raising picture of the herded slavery of the workers in the Soviet mines. Of course it was abstract desire for truth that led Lord Camrose to publish this account rather than the detailed report made by a responsible deputation of our Durham miners who visited the same mines at the same time, and who, for some peculiar reason, saw the exact opposite of the worthy Frenchman.

Mr. English seems to think that scarcely any foreigners have stayed for any length of time in the U.S.S.R. I can assure him that even in the small circle of my friends there are several who have spent many years there, and who happen to make judgments rather different from Mr. Lyons'.

But there is a serious problem here, which I may perhaps discuss in the *Freethinker* at some future date. The defender of the U.S.S.R. is liable to find himself in a false position by taking the attitude that everything in that society is perfect. A position which is the opposite of that of the Russians themselves, who spare no effort to expose everything that is wrong in their own country. Who has ever made more scathing analyses of bad tendencies there than Stalin himself? Read any speech of Stalin's and then any speech of Hitler's, and the difference between a balanced democratic leader and a dictator will be sure to force itself on one. One can believe that the U.S.S.R. is a qualitatively new society which represents a tremendous leap in social evolution; one can believe that, taking all historical factors into consideration, it has moved in the right direction at an almost incredible speed; one can believe that the system defies perversion. And yet one can, like the Soviet peoples themselves, find any amount of internal conflict between good and bad tendencies, and wish to have one's say in denunciation of the bad. But this is a question which needs more elbow-room for discussion.

JACK LINDSAY.

### RUSSIA AND ANTI-SEMITISM

SIR,—Readers of the *Freethinker* expect lies and nonsense from parsons. Their trade demands it, but Mr. Kerr's letter of February 6 contains a sentence, at the end, at which I must vigorously protest. He accuses Stalin of the execution of Jews. I challenge Mr. Kerr to quote me any authority whereby Jews have been executed in Russia, as Jews. Wreckers of the new social order have been executed, and the fact that some have been Jews is besides the point. Anti-Semitism has never been abolished in Russia, because it has never existed since the revolution. The disgraceful inference that Stalin has indulged in Jew-baiting is not even a good lie. If Mr. Kerr can supply me with any details of a single execu-



tion, I will willingly forward a copy of the *Freethinker* to any new reader he cares to name.

## ANTI-DUHRING.

[We regret this letter was crowded out of last week's issue.—ED.]

## FREETHOUGHT IN EDINBURGH

SIR,—I was interested to read the account of a "Full House" for Mr. Cohen when he visited Edinburgh. It is my home town, and was a stronghold of the Church. My recollections of childhood spent there some twenty-eight years ago was marred by the shadow of a constantly recurring Sabbath, which began with drawn blinds, cold breakfast, and a long walk to morning service at 11.30 o'clock. Then followed the long walk home to cold dinner (blinds still drawn) and a rush off again to afternoon Sunday School, and Bible Class at 2.30. No time to return for tea, as evening service began at 6.30, then home again about nine o'clock to cold supper, and the one recompense for an awful day, hot coffee. This tyranny marred an otherwise excellent home. Mr. Cohen's "Full House" would indicate that the shadow is lifting, although I daresay that this type of Sunday did much good "Propaganda" for Atheism.

(Mrs.) N. B. BUXTON.

## Obituary

## WILLIAM HENRY BAKER

Most South London Freethinkers, especially the older ones will remember William Henry Baker, whose death took place on February 6 after a short illness. His services for Freethought took the form of over forty years membership of the National Secular Society, during a part of which he was Secretary of the South London Branch. Freethought was his first love, although he took a keen interest in his Trades Union, and in both movements he made many friends, winning respect and admiration for his frank courage and honest character. In his 80th year at the time of death, he retained his Freethought principles to the end. The funeral took place on Thursday, February 10, at Old Forest Hill Cemetery, Honor Oak, when before a gathering of relatives and friends, including representatives from the South London Branch N.S.S., a Secular Service was conducted at the graveside by Mr. R. H. Rosetti.

## ARTHUR HYATT

ARTHUR HYATT HARLOW—to give him his full name—died on Sunday, February 6. He was buried on Friday, February 11, at Streatham Park Cemetery with the usual rites—he would have said the usual gabblement—of the Church. The responsibility for this fiasco was, at any rate, not his.

Considering that the time and place of the funeral were only known on Wednesday, the 9th, the number of his adherents who attended to show their respect for his memory was an eloquent testimony to the high esteem in which he was held by those who knew of his Freethought work.

He was 78 years of age, and used to say he gave his first Freethought lecture on Clerkenwell Green just after his twentieth birthday. As his health began to fail about eighteen months ago, he had a record of 55 years of active work, going back to the days of Bradlaugh.—E.C.S.

## Branch News

## WEST LONDON BRANCH

The West London Branch held its Annual General Meeting on Thursday, February 3, 1938, at which the following officials were elected: President, Mr. E. C. Saphin;

Treasurer, Mr. H. J. Savory; Secretary, Mr. C. Tuson; Committee: Mrs. N. Edridge, Miss G. Woolstone, Miss J. E. Theestone, Messrs. G. Bedborough, F. Hornibrook, G. N. Barnes, R. Perry, S. Adridge, J. Horowitz, and R. Wortley.

The present satisfactory position of the West London Branch is largely due to the guidance of Mr. E. Bryant, during the four years he has been its President. A cordial vote of thanks and appreciation to Mr. Bryant was heartily endorsed and passed unanimously.

C. TUSON,  
Hon. Secretary.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

## LONDON

## OUTDOOR

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Place): 7.30, Saturday night and Sunday night, Mr. J. W. Barker will speak at each meeting.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond-Hampstead): 11.30, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury. Parliament Hill Fields, 3.0, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury.

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

## INDOOR

MODERN CULTURE INSTITUTE (Caxton Hall): 8.15, Friday, February 25, Dr. Har Dayal will speak on "Gandhi's Philosophy of Life."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH (Alexandra Hotel, South Side, Clapham Common, S.W.4): 7.30, Mr. L. Aldous (League of Nations Union)—"Reduction of the World's Armaments."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, Professor T. H. Pear, M.A., B.Sc.—"Modern Culture and Modern Psychologists."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.): 7.30, Debate—"That Prayer to God is Futile." *Affir.*: Mr. G. Bedborough. *Neg.*: Dom. Dunston Pontifex, O.S.B.

## COUNTRY

## INDOOR.

BIRKENHEAD (Wirral) BRANCH N.S.S. (Beechcroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane): 7.0, W. Fletcher—"Religion, Science and Freethought."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Bristol Street, Schools), 7.0, Mr. W. J. Russell—"The Historical Jesus, Where is He?"

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Laycock's Forum, Albion Court, Kirkgate): 7.15, Mr. J. McClellan (Bury N.S.S.)—"The Curse of Christianity."

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, W. Harrison—"Gods of the World."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, A. G. Senior, Edinburgh N.S.S.—"Democracy or Dictatorship?"

GREENOCK BRANCH N.S.S. (Shepherd's Hall, Regent Street): 7.30, Muriel Whitefield.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Miss Edith Moore (London)—"The Crime of Religions Instruction."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Picton Hall, Liverpool): 7.0, Mr. R. H. Rosetti—"A Search for God."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. ("King's Café," Oxford Road): 7.0, Mr. W. A. Atkinson—"Men and Gods."

WINGATE (Co-operative Hall): 7.0, Monday, February 21, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

NORTH SHIELDS (Lord Nelson): 7.0, Tuesday, February 22, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Green Street): 7.0, Mr. J. T. Brighton—"Afraid of Living."

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