

# THE FREETHINKER

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

Views and Opinions

**A Question of Progress**

A LITTLE while back I received the following letter from the Rev. H. Allen Job, Secretary to the Christian Council Committee on Gambling:—

I read your paragraph about myself in the *Freethinker* of the 15th instant (May 15). I wish you and I could have a talk some time about religion. I only see your paper occasionally, but it always gives me the impression that you still live in the Middle Ages, or at least that you think all ministers of religion are still there. You really ought to know better.

I note Mr. Job's confession that he only reads this journal occasionally, and I assume never reads my books, and so accept his statement as offering an adequate explanation for his thinking that I believe all ministers of religion live in the Middle Ages, and that I am myself living in the atmosphere of that period. If he read our literature regularly he would soon understand what are the aims of the *Freethinker*, and learn Mr. Job's state of mind with regard to the *Freethinker*, but he will, I am sure, appreciate the difference between experiencing a feeling and its diagnosis, and I am rather fond of that form of diagnosis which expresses itself as analysis. I hope, therefore, Mr. Job will not feel annoyed if I deal with him as faithfully as a doctor would with a patient who desires to know the truth. If my doing so leads only to Mr. Job having clearer ideas about Freethought I shall feel repaid for my trouble. Like Mr. Job, my job is to save "souls," although my principal method is that of a clarification of the intellect.

**The Christian Ages**

I can assure Mr. Job that I do not believe all Christian ministers are living in the Middle Ages. But I do not understand why, if I did, Mr. Job should regard my having that belief as reflecting unfavour-

ably on the clergy. For the Middle Ages is unquestionably the period of European history when there was the least Freethought about, and when the Christian Church was at its greatest and its strongest. It was the golden age of the Church, the time when its doctrines were the least questioned, and when Atheism was a very rare phenomenon. All the fundamental beliefs of the Christian Church—heaven and hell, belief in an incarnate god, in miracles, in the power of prayer to work marvels, and so forth, all these belong to the atmosphere of the Dark and Middle Ages. Of course, as readers of the *Freethinker* know, these beliefs ante-date the Middle Ages, and even the Christian era (they are pre-Christian), but they were there in medieval times, just as though the "glory that was Greece" had never existed; and I am a little surprised to find, even if I believed that all clergymen are living in the Middle Ages, that Mr. Job should take this as a reflection on the intelligence of the clergy. I am not a Christian, but considering the very large proportion of the clergy who are living in the Middle Ages, I think it rather unkind of Mr. Job to repudiate association with them, as though someone had asserted that his own family history might be best studied in the volumes of the *Newgate Calendar*, or in the records of a home for the mentally incapable.

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**Clergy and Laity**

I agree that all the clergy are not living in the Middle Ages. That is really part of my case against one section of the ministry, and I appreciate Mr. Job's kindness in spontaneously offering himself as a witness for the prosecution. For while a great many of the clergy are not living, mentally, in the Middle Ages, they do not hesitate to accept a status which owes its existence to beliefs and frames of mind that unquestionably belong to that period. After the recent drought had persisted to the point of almost ruining the crops, many of the clergy issued orders that prayers for rain should be said. Is not that indicative of a mentality that belongs to the Middle Ages? Or does Mr. Job really believe that these prayers have any influence on the weather? When battleships are launched they are often blessed by a parson. Does anyone out of the Middle Ages atmosphere believe that a ship that is blessed stands a better chance of escaping a submarine than one that has not been prayed over? Just about a year ago there was a ceremony in Westminster Abbey, in which the King of England was holy-oiled, and prayed over, and so converted into a "sacred" person, and even became an incarnation of the tribal joss. It was boasted that this ceremony, with its magical significance, was actually taken from the Middle Ages. As a matter of fact it existed long before the Middle Ages, and goes back to the dawn of human civilization. So I might fill columns with one illustration after another of the

manner in which beliefs and ceremonies that have no logical or moral application to current life are perpetuated by the clergy.

But my point is really a very simple one. It is part of my case that there actually is a section of the clergy who are *not* living in the Middle Ages. I should think better of a large number if they were. But they derive their position in society, the privileges granted them by the law, the deference shown them, as clergymen, by a large section of the public, even the "emoluments" which they enjoy, mainly on account of the persistence of beliefs and mental dispositions that were grey with antiquity when the Middle Ages arrived. The men who comprise this section are *not* living in the Middle Ages, but they aim at giving the less intellectual section of their followers the impression that they are. I know that very many of the clergy are not living in the Middle Ages, but I note that when dealing with the majority of their followers they take the greatest pains to persuade them that their belief is still that which the Middle Ages held most sacred.

But there is another, and I think larger, body of the ministry who are obviously, still in the Middle, and even Dark Ages. To this class belongs the preachers of organizations such as the Salvation Army, and a large part of the Nonconformist ministry. Beyond these survivals of the Stone Age, there is the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church with whom many of our Churchmen long to be united. There, is this priesthood with magical candles and magical holy water, its magical transformation of ordinary bread and wine into the flesh and blood of a god, its magical ceremony of confirmation and purification, its miraculous shrines and wells and sacred grottos, with their visitations from supernatural beings, the claim of this Church to "bind and loose," and its claim to dominance over the secular powers. What is all this but a perpetuation of the Middle Ages? Mr. Job cannot really claim that these ideas are born of to-day. Can anyone say plainly where these ideas come from but out of the darkness of semi-civilized human life?

I am not accusing the clergy who *believe* these things of dishonesty. I am not accusing them of paltering with the truth as they see it, or of doing what they do for the sake of gain. Individuals may live on a swindle, but there is a level at which an absurdity requires sincerity for it to be believed. I would never dream of accusing such men as the Bishop of London of not being sincere in their beliefs. It is a terrible thing to say of them, but I think they really do believe in what they say. We have reached the stage when complete sincerity of speech where religion is concerned rests with the foolish. The more intelligent are obviously suspect.

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### Two Types

But there are others beside the clergy who demand attention. A clergy implies a laity, and it is really with the laity that we are chiefly concerned. The only reason for prosecuting a man for selling a dangerous drug is that people buy it. The divisions I have marked as existing among the laity, exist also among the clergy. Among the more intelligent section of the public the clergy of the more "liberal" type confess a deal of the truth about religion, but they are careful not completely to open the eyes of their clients. Then we have, as every scientific student of psychology and anthropology knows, a large body of the people who are intellectually on the level of the Stone Age. These speak the language of civilization, they have the manners of civilization, they use the machinery of civilization, but it is paying them a compliment to say they are on a level with the Middle Ages. Consider the crowd that knelt in the

streets to obtain the blessing of Cardinal Hinsley, because the chief necromancer of his cult had waved his hand over him, sanctified him, and sent him home to England a more "sanctified" man than he was before the Pope had performed his piece of magic. If Cardinal Hinsley and his followers are not living in the Middle Ages, to what period do they belong? I think that to place them as late as Middle Ages is to pay them an unmerited compliment.

We have, thus, the same division among the laity that we have among the clergy. We have the clergy who cater for the more enlightened—perhaps one ought to say the half-enlightened—and who strive by every trick of speech, and distortion of real Christianity to prove that the Church is true to "the faith once delivered to the Saints." The clergy do not lead this class, they follow it. They admit only so much of the truth as they feel their congregations will demand. And when, as was the case with the recent Report on Doctrine, they feel that some readjustment must be made, they give us a watered-down version of some of the things that Freethinkers have been shouting from the housetops for generations.

Beyond this class we have the believers in fortune-telling tea-leaves, upholders of lucky days, and fortune-bringing mascots, miraculous answers to prayers, who shrink from black cats and cross-eyed spinsters, and who naturally find nothing inherently incredible in Bible stories and Church or Chapel teachings on their lowest level of undisguised superstition. These people must be catered for, from the point of view of the "dignified clergy" it is considered important they should be catered for. For if they are not, they may gradually come into the ranks of the more enlightened, and the more enlightened will become the completely enlightened, and what then can be the use of any clergy? There would then be room only for teachers, and, as such, the clergy are not that, save in the lower sense that the man who advises another to carry a potato in his trouser-pocket to cure rheumatism is a teacher.

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### Our Policy

Now the *Freethinker* is, to use a somewhat cant remark, "realist" in its outlook. It faces the facts as they are. It deals with the bearing of modern thought on religious beliefs, and raids the armouries of science and philosophy for weapons. It deals faithfully with what is called the "higher Christianity," as though a teaching which perpetuates the lower in the act of stating the "higher" can be anything other than sophisticated deception. Personally, I have for nearly half a century been trying to get some responsible and educated clergyman to face the simple proposition, "If what modern scientific research has to tell us concerning the origins of religion be true, the question 'Is religion true?' is no longer relevant. Have we anything to study save the history of a delusion?" Up to date I have not found a single responsible parson who would face that definite and simple issue. The clergy wish me to accept before I examine, and promise me belief if I will do so. There are various forms of the confidence trick.

But the *Freethinker* does not forget the huge mass of Christian believers who still accept the inspiration of the Bible, who still believe in miracles and in miraculous answers to prayers, who still believe in "sacred" places, persons and things. It also aims at enlightening them, and one way or another we are making progress with this class. But to get at them we have to handle matters that Mr. Job thinks are out of date. They really are not with the majority of believers, and, if I may say so without offending, I have my doubts whether Mr. Job believes that for huge masses of the people these things are out of date. I do

believe he wishes me to believe they are, because then we should leave off attacking them. But I do not think that Mr. Job is so parsonically unselfish as to wish to advise me of a more effective way of attacking religion. So I think we must go on as we have been going—attacking both ends of the religious structure, the end that considers religion is good for the people, and the people who believe that religion is good for them. Our method has been very effective so far, although if Mr. Job can suggest a better way of weaning people away from Christianity, I shall listen to him with respect and gratitude.

And I fancy I should be interested in a talk with Mr. Job about religion. We might do so over a cup of tea, or if he prefers it—for I have never been drunk enough to become a teetotaller—over a glass of wine.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## Silk and Sackcloth

"Another peculiarity of the Russells is, that they never alter their opinions; they are an excellent race, but they must be trepanned before they can be convinced."

Sydney Smith.

THE Wesley Bi-centenary has been the occasion of an unusual amount of publicity in the newspaper press. With eyes on the millions of Methodists, the editors have surpassed themselves, and the journalists, writing on an unfamiliar subject, have shown once more how shallow a thing press-writing can be.

Judging by the newspaper articles, one would imagine that Wesleyanism was at its zenith, and might still conquer fresh worlds. The contrary is the case, for it is actually dying. It could scarcely be otherwise. Wesleyanism is but the shadow of John Wesley himself, and such a figure makes little appeal in the twentieth century, however bravely he mouthed and strutted amid the darkness and ignorance of the eighteenth. Times have changed, and men's minds have broadened. Even at its highest valuation, the tenets of Wesley were but a relish of the centuries'-old Christian Superstition, and the subsequent history of the Wesleyan Church was but the last kick of Puritanism. Now that the rising generation finds little to attract it in the old, old theological shibboleths, its doom is said, and no reshuffling of ministers, no closing of redundant chapels, no hysterical rhetoric, no press advertising, will prevent its decay and final dissolution.

The old Greeks used to say that those whom the gods wished to destroy they first drove mad. Apart from the theistic gloss, there is a germ of truth in the assertion. In the case of the Methodists, these people are engaged in the pleasant pastime of digging the grave of their own church; and they have joined a Suicide Club. Wesleyanism, as taught by its founder, was a narrow, restricted, austere view of life. It was a case of the one-eyed leader guiding the blind. The founder himself was a fanatical spell-binder, the flock ignorant and stupid. Two hundred years ago the populace was both very ignorant, and still under the duress of Feudalism. Wesley was a gentleman, in brocaded dress with silver-buckled shoes, and he addressed the common people in their own language. Born to servitude, the people were flattered by his attention, and swayed by his eloquence. A born leader, Wesley had very remarkable gifts for organization. The gifts of rich sympathizers consolidated the new sect, and its lengthy survival is as much due to trust-funds as to the zeal of its supporters. But present-day Methodism has only too much affinity to that

family in the *Pilgrim's Progress*—Mr. Despondency and his daughter Muchafraid.

There was nothing super-natural in John Wesley's own conversion. Such occurrences are commonplaces in almost every chapel, tin tabernacle, and mission-tent in the English-speaking world. In America, this sort of thing occurs on a large scale, and converts are numbered in hundreds. If one counted the figures recording "the souls snatched from Satan" from the religious press of England during the past fifty years, the total would comprise a very large share of the entire population. It is a grim business, for all his religious hysteria represents the very backwash of the tide of civilization. These people are remote from culture, talk strange language, dwell in intellectual darkness, but they are our countrymen.

Wesley's personality could neither have grown nor thriven outside the English-speaking world. It is one of the oldest of blends, for it includes a good deal of Paul Pry, a touch of Samuel Pecksniff, and an infinite amount of Sunday-school teacher. In the bad, old, wicked days of absolute monarchy, it was an unwritten law that "the King could do no wrong." This adage Wesley applied to himself. He magnanimously denounced all those who dared to utter a word against the narrow creed he had espoused. His theology was simply the "resurrection pie" of his Puritan predecessors. There was no "crying for the moon," no aspiration, no humanism.

The great English and French Freethinkers had already begun their work for human emancipation, but it was not until the aftermath of the French Revolution reached England that improvement began to be made in the condition of the English people. It is sheer nonsense to pretend that Methodism had anything to do with this. The Church from which Wesley sprang was the State-supported Church of England. Its attitude towards the workers was not only objectionable, but unforgivable. What sixteen hundred years of the rule of the Bishops, and over three centuries of "the open Bible" had done for the common people of England has been told by Joseph Arch, the first agricultural labourer who became a member of Parliament. In most moving language he has described the conduct of god-fearing Churchmen towards their own poorer brethren, not towards outsiders:—

First up walked the squire to the communion rails; the farmers went up next; then up went the tradesmen, the shopkeepers, the wheelwright and the blacksmith, and then, the very last of all, went the poor agricultural labourers. They walked up by themselves; nobody else went with them; it was as if they were unclean—and at the sight the iron entered into my heart and remained fast embedded there. I said to myself, "If that's what goes on—never for me."

The noblest quality in the great Freethinking pioneers is the eternal quality of honest indignation. It is this quality that makes their work a power, not only unmatched but unmatchable. They are not merely rebels, but advocates arraigning tyranny before the bar of public opinion. Wesley had nothing of this. It was left to the Chartists, the early co-operators, and the Freethinkers to challenge successfully the Juggernaut of Authority. Methodism was never other than an earlier form of the Salvation Army, that marched up the hill, and marched down again, but never won a victory. If it had not been supported by wealthy patrons, and buttressed by trust-funds, it would not have survived until to-day. Wesley himself to the end regarded his own movement as a movement within the Anglican Church. He was wiser than his own deluded followers. Methodism, is, in fact, a revival movement converted by money

into an organism, and it will inevitably share the fate of all other organisms.

The real trouble with Methodism, and with the Christian Religion itself, is that it is not true. The whole thing is a misapprehension, due largely to ignorance and coxsureness. Whether the believer relies upon the sovereign authority of a great church, or upon his own interpretation of an alleged sacred book, he is unconsciously in servitude to an old-world Oriental superstition, which is antagonistic to reason and to civilization. If the silly story of "Adam" and "Eve" and the talking snake is not fact, but simply a legend, what becomes of the vast theological edifice built upon this relic of serpent worship, which is regarded as the basis for the marvellous story of the redemption of the world? And what is to be made of the still sillier idea of "Jesus" being offered as a sacrifice to "Jehovah," of a god being cruelly killed to appease himself? These things cannot be the last words, the verdict from which there is no appeal, for humanity at large. For the legends originated from a barbarous Oriental people, whose wisest King has seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, and whose history is not unlike the records of the Newgate Calendar. Such things cannot be regarded as the pillars of wisdom with impunity. The Methodist Church regarded life as a valley of tribulation. It was wicked to dance, wicked to go to a theatre, wicked to play cards, wicked to bet, wicked to amuse oneself on Sundays, and very wicked to enter a rival place-of-worship. It was as extreme a view of existence as the Romish idea of forcing human beings into monasteries and nunneries. So grossly imperfect, so utterly false are these conceptions of human life, that it makes one shiver at its ineptitude and inconsequence. It is high time that men came out of the dark valley of superstition into the universe, for such transition will mean:—

"A beauty and a glory of the world  
Emerged from Christendom, like love's beloved  
With April from the withered womb of death,  
Delivered fresh to Aphrodite's arms."

MIMNERMUS.

## The Roman Catholic Confessional

IN his painstaking study: *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences*, Dr. H. C. Lea strictly confined his inquiry to original sources and Catholic commentators in the interest of accuracy and impartiality. He laid bare the facts, thus leaving the reader full liberty to form his own conclusions. Still, this three-volume masterpiece constitutes a damning indictment of a system conducive to the corruption of the minds and morals of countless penitents, while serving to sustain an ecclesiastical despotism unparalleled in human annals.

No matter how heinous the crime confessed to a Catholic priest under seal, no disclosure of the offence is permitted. Whatever admission is made to the father confessor remains inviolable. Consequently, every penitent "can repose absolute reliance on the impenetrable silence with which his utterances shall be covered."

Whether the seal of the confessional is sacramental or not, the Church now declares its origin divine. Aquinas and Duns Scotus alike agree that the officiating priest should follow God's example for "as God does not reveal the sins made known to him in confession, so the priest should be equally reticent."

In the primitive Church public penance for private sins was requisite, but this custom was gradually re-

placed by secret confession. Now, however, the Church pretends that auricular confession is of ancient date. "Yet," comments Dr. Lea, "the theologians are blind to the fact that when they give as a reason for the disuse of public penance . . . that it would violate the seal, they admit that the latter is of comparatively recent introduction."

According to current Catholic doctrine penitential confession is a sacrament instituted by Christ, and by him conferred on the Church, which grants absolution for sins committed after baptism. In his article on *Penance* in the *Catholic Encyclopædia*, Prof. E. J. Hanna assures us that: "The grace conferred is deliverance from the guilt of sin, and in the case of mortal sin from its eternal punishment. . . . Finally, the confession is made not in the secrecy of the penitent's heart, nor to the layman as friend and advocate, nor to a representative of human authority, but to a duly declared priest with requisite jurisdiction, and with the 'power of the keys,' i.e., the power to forgive sins which Christ granted to his Church."

Although in the early Church the prayers of saints and martyrs possessed special mediatory powers, no special importance was attached to the supplications of priests. Still as the influence of the Church increased there arose the belief that God had conveyed to the clergy some shadowy and mysterious capacity to absolve the sinner. Appeal began to be made to the Scriptures, especially to the passage in Matthew xvi. 19, which still serves as its chief authority: "And I will give to thee (Peter) the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatever thou shalt bind on earth it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven."

The primitive Church restricted whatever authority this passage was supposed to confer to the apostles alone. As Lea points out: "At the time the Gospels were composed the apostles were not expected to have any successors, for Christ had foretold the coming of the Day of Judgment before that generation should pass away, and the presence of this in all the synoptic gospels shows how universal among Christians was the expectation of its fulfilment." The most guileless early Christian would have been amazed at the suggestion that any mere man, however licentious or illiterate, should have possessed the power to grant complete absolution to a penitent sinner simply because he was arrayed in priestly vestments. Truly enough it is said "that such a pretension should be accepted in Europe, even in the Dark Ages, would be incredible if it had not proved a fact."

That this sacerdotal assumption was unknown in earlier times is shown by the complete silence of the Fathers of the Church. St. Clement, St. Ignatius, Barnabas and many others when advising transgressors to become reconciled with God are unaware of only subordinate intercession. When it was suggested in the third century that fornicators and adulterers might be pardoned when penitent, Tertullian sternly denounced this proposal. But in certain sees the power of the keys began to pass from the apostles to the bishops. Still, in the fourth century, St. Peter of Alexandria knew nothing of priestly forgiveness for "the Church," he says, "can only pray that Christ may intercede for sinners with the Father."

The economic factor soon emerged: the privilege of sundry prelates was claimed by schismatics. The heretical Manichæans who reprobated the use of money willingly pardoned the sins of those who supplied them with food. This may have induced Basil the Great to pronounce "that authority to bind and to loose is lodged with the bishops."

Many prominent theologians continued to deny the power of the keys. Others vacillated, but those who

asserted that every ordained priest is clothed with supreme authority were destined to prevail. In lands inhabited by the recently converted barbarians, the Penitential canons were utilized by priests to whom the bishops delegated their powers of granting absolution. The turmoil of the time and the almost insuperable obstacles to travel in unchartered territories led to this concession to priests who were almost as ignorant as their uncouth flocks. Still, even so late as the twelfth century, Peter of Poitiers declares, "that priests have only potential power of the keys, and cannot exercise it without delegation from the bishop."

When the Carolingian Empire disintegrated, the Church planned its policy of securing temporal power. Those brazen forgeries, the false Decretals were concocted, and the Papacy already strengthened by Charlemagne, was successful in its aim. Meanwhile, a forged document appeared in which St. Peter is made to transfer the power of the keys conferred by Christ to his Holy Church. This decretal declares that the bishops are empowered to open or close the portals of paradise.

Yet, even with this and other fabrications the theologians themselves were still at variance in the tenth century concerning the keys, while their arrogance is illustrated by the Bishop of Vercelli's claim that the episcopacy should be immune to the civil law, for holy men endowed with the office of purging the sins not only of mere mortals, but also those of angels are not to be judged. An even more astounding example of clerical audacity is afforded by Ruthenius of Verona, who is cited by Lea. "Bishops, he says, are Gods, they are Christs, they are angels, kings and princes; they are physicians of souls, the janitors of paradise bearing the keys of heaven. . . . Yet of these divine beings he admits that there is scarce one fitted for the position, or fit even to lay hands on another when elected, while the priests are only to be distinguished from the laity by shaving, the tonsure, some slight difference in garments and the negligent performances of the offices, to satisfy the world rather than God."

His Holiness Gregory VII. pardoned sinners in their absence for a consideration, and other Popes participated in the same mercenary practice. Still the conflicting utterances of various sacerdotalists show that, so far, there was no general concensus of opinion regarding absolution.

Modern Catholic theology is the product of a prolonged development, although systematized by the Schoolmen of the University of Paris. Dr. Lea considers the ninth and twelfth centuries as the most important periods of Catholic accommodation and change. "What the Schoolmen accomplished was moulded into symmetry by the master hand of Thomas Aquinas, the most perfect product of scholasticism, who grasped all the labours of his predecessors and reduced them to a system which, despite the opposition of the Scotists, has held its place to the present day."

Although some zealous Churchmen expressed their misgivings, and Michael Bay contended that the Almighty alone justifies the sincerely penitent sinner, while the priest merely removes the penalty, his teachings were emphatically censured by the Popes St. Pius V. in 1567; Gregory XIII. in 1579; and Urban VIII., in 1641. One of the most illustrious Cardinals, Bellarmine averred that the priest's word alone suffices to liberate the soul from the bonds of sin, thus precluding eternal perdition, while Benedict XIII. expressed the same conviction and Juenin even asserted that no sinner may obtain remission of sin or reconciliation with God without sacerdotal absolution. At long last, the doctrine of the power of the keys was firmly established despite all the demurs and denials of preceding centuries. No wonder Dr. Lea inquired:

"Who can deny that Catholic theology is a progressive science, and who can predict what may be its ultimate development? Yet the satisfaction with which modern teachers may well regard their conquests over the infinite must be tempered with regret that for the greater part of its existence the Church misled the faithful as to the extent of the gifts bestowed upon it by God."

The scandalous lives led by perhaps, the great majority of the clergy were notorious for centuries. Their avarice, venality and almost invincible obscurantism, were so conspicuous throughout the Dark Ages, that it became advisable to explain and extenuate the enormous powers they were permitted to exercise. No sooner had the power of the keys received Papal confirmation than its shameful abuse was openly displayed. The learned doctor Alain de Lille was so shocked that he denounced the keys as those of hell, for "they betray souls to eternal death."

Peter of Palermo, writing in the fourteenth century actually claimed that the ordinary priest in granting absolution to the penitent wielded superior power to that of the heavenly angels or even to the Blessed Virgin Mary herself. Moreover, in a modern Catholic manual: *Müller's Catholic Priesthood* bearing the imprimatur of Cardinal McClosky (New York, 1885), it is stated that: "So great is the power of the priest that the judgment of heaven itself is subject to his decision."

Auricular confession is indubitably instrumental in enabling the Roman Church to exercise its most potent domination over the minds and emotions of its adherents. Thus, this iniquitous system serves to sustain the Church's power and prestige. As Lea cogently concludes: "Theologians may among themselves admit that the keys can err, and that the judgments passed on earth may not be ratified in heaven, but the plain people are taught that the priest holds their eternal destiny in his hands, and to them he is virtually God, for he has the power to convert guilt into innocence."

T. F. PALMER.

#### THE BIBLE

In Mr. H. G. Wells' recently published book, *The Anatomy of Frustration*, he puts into the mouth of his principle character, William Burroughs Steele, some frank criticisms of much which is regarded as religious high-water mark ethics. Readers will enjoy "Steele's allusions to The Ten Commandments," and the "Shorter Catechism." This man Steele covers a very wide area in his twenty-five chapters, and in each case one's thought is stimulated—the more readily because Wells is contented to act the part of a reporter—neither confirming nor disapproving of "Steele's" comments on life. We quote a passage on Nazism, which will interest our readers:—

. . . The German National Socialist movement is essentially Jewish in spirit and origin, it is Bible-born, an imitation of Old Testament nationalism. The Jews have been taxed with most sins, but never before with begetting the Nazi, but Steele writes of it as if it were self-evident. National Socialism, he declares, is inverted Judaism, which has retained the form of the Old Testament, and turned it inside out. Hitler never made a speech yet that could not be rephrased in Bible language. Only a Bible-saturated people in these days, a people ignorant in the mass of modern biology and general history, could take so easily to national egotism, to systematic xenophobia, to self-righteous ideas of conquest and extermination. The German mind, never a very subtle or critical one, the copions abounding German mind, was poisoned in the Lutheran schools. The preservation of the Bible as a book sacred beyond criticism, has kept alive a tradition of barbaric cunning and barbaric racialism, generation after generation, to the infinite injury of economic and political life.

## Unbelief

CHRISTIAN: "Unbelief is a deadly sin, and all guilty of it are destined for Hell."

Sceptic: "What exactly do you mean by unbelief?"

C.: "A refusal to believe the teachings of the Holy Scriptures."

S.: "Wherein, among innumerable other absurdities, we are told to destroy witches; that it is wrong to take heed of the morrow; that we should take no thought of what to eat or drink or what clothes we should wear, that we should be meek, and if smitten on one cheek, should turn the other also to be smitten; that we should love our enemies; that every man should remain in the same employment wherein he was called; that bodily exercise profiteth little, and that women should not be permitted to teach. Would you describe as unbelief any disavowal of these injunctions? If so, the Christian heaven must be inhabited by a very small coterie of peculiar people."

C.: "I console myself with the belief that God is merciful."

S.: "Despite his condemnation of countless souls to eternal torment, an atrocity compared with which the bombing of open towns seems an act of mercy! However, I will not dwell on this aspect of the matter, for I am more concerned in showing how impossible it is for people to observe many of the teachings of the Scriptures."

C.: "The examples you give are not convincing. Can you produce others?"

S.: "They are too numerous to give in detail, and I will therefore confine myself to two only. Are you a Low Churchman?"

C.: "Yes."

S.: "Then presumably you are opposed to the doctrine of Transubstantiation."

C.: "I am."

S.: "Why?"

C.: "Because my reason rejects the claim that the bread and wine actually become in any shape or form the flesh and blood of our Saviour. It is an obvious impossibility."

S.: "But Jesus said of the bread 'Take, eat; this is my body,' and of the wine, 'This is my blood which is shed for many.' It seems to me that however grotesque it may appear to those accustomed to rely upon their reason Catholics and Anglo-Catholics are justified by the authority of the Bible in claiming a change of the bread and wine in the Eucharist into the body and blood of Christ. They are acting in conformity with the gospel teachings, and all who differ from them on this point are guilty of what you term unbelief. The Scriptures also teach us that we cannot be saved unless we are baptized. Devout Baptists have told me they are satisfied that none but those who have been *baptized by immersion* can be saved, for all who neglect this ceremony will be treated by the "Saviour" as unbelievers. And all who find it impossible to believe the teachings of the Scriptures are destined to spend an eternity in a lake of fire! How apparently sane people can be induced by priestly influence to believe this nonsense is beyond my understanding."

PRO REASON.

Rev. Caller: "Well, Mrs. Jones, and is the good man any better?"

Mrs. Jones: "Oh, yes Sir. 'E's nearly all right agen, sir. 'E don't say 'is prayers no more of a night now sir."

## Executive's Annual Report

THIS is the seventy-first report of the Executive of the National Secular Society, and never has a report been issued when circumstances, at home and abroad, were charged with greater significance for the future of Freethought. In some countries, in the name of this or that political or economic theory, freedom of thought is not merely denied in practice, it is challenged in theory and is suppressed with attendant brutalities such as the world has not known for centuries. Even in this country inroads are being made on that freedom of speech and publication, and the rights of the individual, which we had come to regard as beyond question. In these circumstances the existence of a society such as ours, which demands freedom of speech as the right of all, apart from specific, social, political or religious opinions, and when on all sides there is a marked tendency to sacrifice principle to a short-sighted expediency, carries with it inspiration and hope.

It must once more be pointed out that this is the Report of the Executive only, and the financial statement that is presented to the Conference is a statement only of the Executive's income and expenditure. Each Branch of the Society raises funds on its own account, carries on its own propaganda—within the framework of the Society—and duly accounts for its activities direct to its own members. In their work they are helped by the Executive financially and by counsel when requested to do so. The financial help given shows an increase year by year, and so long as the work done is of a satisfactory character that is all to the good. The only qualification in this matter is that financial help from headquarters should not undermine local support. Every endeavour should be made to enlist in the work those who are in sympathy with our movement. This means greater moral support not merely a larger income.

During the year the Executive has been directly responsible for no less than 658 meetings in different parts of the country. This is an advance of more than 200 on last year's figures. The total number of lectures delivered by the whole of the Society would run to a very large figure. A large number of these lectures are delivered in the open-air, and once again the Executive wishes to express the high appreciation of the Society for the work of those on whom these meetings depend. Braving all sorts of weather is perhaps the least of the difficulties experienced. The labour of carrying and erecting platforms, of overcoming opposition—not always of a friendly or merely controversial nature—is very great indeed. It is work that is done without ostentation and with no hope of material gain. The number of those who voluntarily devote their energies to this work is on the increase, and out of so large a body it would be invidious to single out a name here and there. We can only place upon record our deep appreciation of the work done, which when it is well-done is of first-rate value to the Cause in this country. The skill of a general is of small account without the service of willing and intelligent co-operators. Freethought has in the past had no lack of the type of character that is willing to devote itself to such arduous work, and its future is safe while it can draw upon men and women of that stamp.

In accordance with the resolution passed at the last Conference, an invitation was issued by this Society, in co-operation with the Rationalist Press Association, the Union of Ethical Societies and the South Place Ethical Society to the World Union of Freethinkers to hold its Annual Congress in London in September next. The announcement of the

acceptance of the invitation was made public, and also the fact that the whole of the expenses of the Congress would be met by the four English bodies named. A programme for the Congress was drawn up by the English Committee formed, a Committee of which your President is Chairman, and after submission to the General Committee of the Union, was adopted. Everything was plain and above board. There was indeed nothing to hide.

In spite of this an agitation was set on foot, beginning with the Catholics, and taken up eagerly by a section of the English Church, for the prevention of the Congress. It was categorically stated that the Congress had been ordered by Russia, financed by Russia, and that the whole thing was of foreign origin, organized for some sinister purpose in this country. Petitions were organized, questions were asked in Parliament, and the Home Secretary was implored to prohibit the Congress. Of course, the Home Secretary has no such power, particularly when International Conferences dealing with religion and other subjects are continually being held in this country. The agitation is still being pursued, although with a forced diminution of the virulence previously manifested, and a little more caution in the lies told. But only recently Cardinal Hinsley, probably in order to alarm the Government, threw out a covert hint that force might be used to prevent the Congress if other means failed.

Up to the present many English and Foreign scientists have announced their support of the Congress, and it bids fair to be a success. But the agitation against the Congress comes as a reminder that the old-time religious intolerance is not quite so near being defunct as some would have us believe. It is being held in check because there has been created an atmosphere which makes its open manifestation unwise. Freethought is abroad, it is expressing no more than the truth to say that in the creation of this more liberal atmosphere no organization has done so much towards it as this Society, and there may yet come a time when we may be called upon to prove that we are worthy of our predecessors.

During the past years a number of complaints of police and other interferences with public meetings have reached the Executive. Most of these gave way before advice given to those concerned, and some of the cases involved no more than over officiousness on the part of some over-zealous police officer, who was endeavouring to show preferential treatment between different meetings. It is interesting to note that so soon as it was known the N.S.S. was concerned there was often a marked difference in the attitude of the authorities.

It must be borne in mind that in English Law there is no legal right of meeting on the public highway. On the other hand, apart from special legislation, which applies to special places, no one has the legal right to interfere with a meeting unless there is a clear infraction of common rights. But in every case, even where there is an assumed threat to the public peace, the onus of proof lies with the prosecution. And the liability to a prosecution may be incurred by a member, or members of the audience, and is not necessarily caused by the speaker who is addressing the meeting.

In one case the interference of the police took the shape of a prosecution against the sale of literature in what was claimed to be prohibited hours. This case occurred in Edinburgh. Mr. G. Whitehead was summoned for a breach of the Shop Hours Act, and for an infraction of a local bye-law for selling literature after 8 o'clock. So soon as the Executive was informed of the fact it engaged legal aid, and the case was ad-

## Acid Drops

The *Afro-American* for April 16, published in Baltimore, U.S.A., publishes a supplementary sheet, *The Jerusalem Times*, which is intended to present what might have occurred in Jerusalem on the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Under the heading of "Quick work," appears the following:—

Military authorities are to be congratulated for the dispatch with which they disposed last week of Jesus of Nazareth, the Galilean Revolutionist, who said he was the Son of God and King of the Jews. . . . Jerusalem is well rid of such a trouble-maker.

There is also an interview with the "Mother of Jesus," who said:—

I have known ever since an angel notified me of the conception of my Sin that this was to be.

Mary also describes how useful he was in doing the domestic "chores":—

He would spin flax, mend and patch clothing, almost as well as I. . . . He died nobly. No one could face a mob of lynchers with more courage.

There is a report of an interview with Mary Magdalene after Jesus had appeared to her, and there is also an account of the conversion of three of the executioners of Jesus. One told a reporter of the *Jerusalem Times* that he was cured of an affection of the eye when three drops of the blood of Jesus fell on him. It is very amusing, although meant to be taken seriously. But we wish the *Afro-American* had imagined such a story as that of Jesus becoming current in an American city, and had sent one of its reporters to investigate. We have often thought of doing that ourselves. Perhaps we will one day.

There is no end to the audacity of the believer in "Religious" Education in our schools. A correspondent in the *Catholic Herald* makes seven demands. Besides the usual request for purely Roman Catholic lessons, books and atmosphere, this writer thinks

that every Catholic school should have at least one really good authoritative speaker, to give a lecture to the children, preferably illustrated, on the causes, events and personalities in the Spanish War, to make clear the justice of General Franco's cause.

Could sectarian intrusion into what ought to be "education" go farther than this? And it is in support of people who will put forward claims of this kind that our Government is subsidizing to the extent of presenting them with schools to which they contributed a paltry 25 per cent of the cost. Fifty years ago the Government that hinted at this would have stood a good chance of being thrown out of office.

The Rev Donald Soper, whom we think rather fancies himself as an "Infidel slayer"—we do not think that he can honestly claim any success as an Infidel converter—believes the "indiscriminate reading of the Bible without an interpreter" to be "danger." Now that is a fine thing to say of the once alleged "divine" author of the Bible, a book which the Archbishop of Canterbury says contains the "oracles of God." God gives man a revelation, but he is so far unable to make plain what he wishes to be understood that there must be an interpreter who can tell us what the deuce God meant when he sent out his message! Even the late Ramsay Macdonald could not better this for confusion. And which interpreter are we to take? Is it the Roman Catholic or the Protestant, the Church of England or the Baptist, the Salvation Army or Mrs. Eddy? Up to date events have shown that the most reliable interpreters of the Bible are those who don't believe in it. They are certainly the only body of interpreters that are gaining ground.

In the *Sunday Chronicle* Mr. H. W. Seaman has a displayed article on prayer. He follows the safe line of saying that while he does not pray himself, he thinks it would be foolish to deny its power. Mr. Seaman may be

writing with his tongue in his cheek, as the most convinced Atheist may readily admit that people may find comfort in prayer, and the simple may believe that when something happens that is pleasing to themselves, they may easily attribute it to supernatural assistance. To say this much is no more than to note a certain psychological attitude, and to explain its influence on not too intelligent people. The other explanation may be that Mr. Seaman is writing as a journalist, and a professional journalist writes what is wanted, or what there is a market for.

But here is Mr. Seaman's case, the only one he gives, of an answer to prayer. A woman married a man who turned out worthless. The home became a rendezvous of a "fast crowd." The wife "entered headlong into the hectic life." She developed an obsession for drink, and was sent to an institution. Released she was sent to gaol for drunkenness. In prison she recovered her faith in God, and felt that God was with her. Then she was released, and several months later her husband was killed in a motor accident. "Once again the hand of God had freed me from bondage." Then she got married again and God blessed her with two sons. She is now quite happy.

That is Mr. Seaman's story, a record that has deeply impressed him. We hardly like to think that Mr. Seaman is quite as foolish as he claims to be. What kind of a God is it who lets a woman—a religious woman—from a religious home—marry the wrong man, permits her to fall into drunkenness, allows her to go to prison, and afterwards kills the husband in an "arranged" motor accident, so that the woman can be freed from him? Mr. Seaman thinks his story evidence that God answers prayers. It appears to prove nothing except the number of silly people about, and the readiness of other people to use them as material for articles. We ought not to leave out editors who know the kind of public they cater for.

A coach carrying 25 pilgrims to Lourdes overturned in a ditch with many of its occupants. None was killed, and we ought, we suppose, to put that down to watchfulness of God. We are quite certain that their priests will have told the passengers that they ought to thank God that their injuries were not more serious—on the principle that if a flea sits down on you, thank God it isn't an elephant. But if God could so arrange matters that the coach fell over gently, why on earth didn't he use a little more energy and prevent it falling at all? But God's ways are not our ways—if they were, society would be even worse than it is. Let us be grateful that God early left off making *all* men in his own image.

We appreciate the attack by the Bishop of Chelmsford on the Nazi Jew-baiters. We ignore for the moment the consideration that all the Freethought organizations in Germany have been suppressed, and Freethinkers persecuted without protest from the Bishop. But we wonder what the Bishop means to imply by his references to "mocking the Jewish religion." Surely the Bishop's legitimate cause of protest is full enough when he points to "these unhappy people having been bullied, harried, robbed, driven mad, or forced into suicide." It suggests a poor sense of proportion to allude to criticism, be it in good or bad taste, as if it was worse than murder. It is the "mock made of the Jewish religion" which alone incurs the condemnation of the bishop as being "to the great shame of their persecutors." The persecution is condemned, but the blasphemy is worse. The Bishop concludes with "This kind of thing will bring its punishment with it. Verily there is a God which judgeth the earth." But what kind of *justice* does that offer those who are suffering from Nazi savagery? It is not revenge that is required but justice. That God may amuse himself by afterwards punishing these German brutes, does not remove what has been done.

A correspondent of the *British Weekly* sees a distinct prediction in Isaiah xxviii. 14, of the Anglo-Italian Agreement. We are not surprised. We have often seen a distinct anticipation of many samples of twentieth century clerical self-righteous santimoniousness in 1 Cor.

xii. 11: "I am become a fool in glorying," and many a sad description of the kind of world which the Churches made of earth when they were in power—see such passages as Hosea xiii. 7, 8. Franco must often look to a text like Ezek. vi. 12-13, which caps a description of the horrors of war and pestilence, with the appropriate words: "Then shall ye know that I am the Lord."

Visitors to the Glasgow Exhibition will find therein a chapel of the Episcopal Church of Scotland, with "a striking figure of Christ" above the doorway. When they get in they will be offered a number of tracts, and a chaplain on duty will be there to render whatever "spiritual refreshment" the visitor demands. Now if the place is cool and comfortably furnished, we have no doubt that many will gladly go in for half-an-hour's quiet rest. And with people who are tired, their half-closed eyes, and semi-somnolent nods during their period of rest may easily be chronicled as consequences of the talk of the chaplain or the soothing effects of the tracts. But after all, the Exhibition is a trade show, it is intended to stimulate trade, and the religious business is a very large one. Moreover, in common with other trades it has been suffering a depression, there are "distressed areas" on the religious map, the workers in that area have for long been clamouring for a revival of their industry, and for larger salaries.

### Fifty Years Ago

COL. INGERSOLL was selected by the New York Assembly to pay a tribute to the memory of the statesman, Roscoe Conkling. The *New York World* reports that the Albany Academy of Music was packed an hour before the time with nearly four thousand admirers. From the report of the magnificent eulogy we select the following as of enduring importance:—

"Fortunate is that nation great enough to know the great. When a great man dies—one who has nobly fought the battle of a life, who has been faithful to every trust, and has uttered his highest, noblest thought—one who has stood proudly by the right in spite of jeer and taunt, neither stopped by foe nor swerved by friend—in honouring him, in speaking words of praise and love above his dust, we pay a tribute to ourselves.

"Most people are the slaves of habit—followers of custom—believers in the wisdom of the past—and were it not for brave and splendid souls 'the dust of antique time would lie unswept, and mountainous error be too highly heaped for truth to overpeer.' Custom is a prison, locked and barred by those who long ago were dust, the keys of which are in keeping of the dead.

"Nothing is grander than when a strong, intrepid man breaks chains, levels walls, and breasts the many-headed mob like some great cliff that meets and mocks the innumerable billows of the sea.

"The politician hastens to agree with the majority—insists that their prejudice in patriotism, that their ignorance is wisdom—not that he loves them, but because he loves himself. The statesman, the real reformer, points out the mistakes of the multitude, attacks the prejudices of his countrymen, laughs at their follies, denounces their cruelties, enlightens and enlarges their minds, and educates the conscience—not because he loves himself, but because he loves and serves the right and wishes to make his country great and free.

"With him defeat is but a spur to further effort. He who refuses to stoop, who cannot be bribed by the promise of success or the fear of failure—who walks the highway of the right, and in disaster stands erect, is the only victor. Nothing is more despicable than to reach fame by crawling—position by cringing.

"When real history shall be written by the truthful and the wise, these men, these kneelers at the shrines of chance and fraud, these brazen idols worshipped once as gods, will be the very food for scorn, while those who bore the burden of defeat, who earned and kept their self-respect, who would not bow to man or men for place or power, will wear upon their brows the laurel mingled with the oak."

# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

FRANKLIN STEINER.—Shall be very pleased if you are able to come to London for the International Congress, or at any other time. We hope the proposal you name will mature and prove successful.

T. CURTISS (Marseilles).—Thanks for enquiry. We are feeling well enough, but could do with a little more leisure than we are able to get. Perhaps that will come presently.

H.L.—We have no knowledge of any such person. The most curious story Mr. Cohen has heard for some time is that of a person, recently dead, whom we are told claimed to have been a personal friend and was present at his wedding. That took place in Registry Office, and no such person, or indeed any outsider, was present.

H. SCOTT.—Thanks for letter. The notice was an expression of good-nature we saw no reason for vetoing. Our own estimate would have been different. We were not aware of what you say about K. D. Macdonald, although we have often wondered what became of him. We regarded him as an able man with a marked kink.

C. E. SIMPSON.—If you heard G. W. Foote lecture in the hall you name, it must be well over fifty years ago, and therefore entitles you to a place of honour on our readers of fifty years standing. Greetings.

C. SAMUELS.—Pleased to have your reports of the very successful meetings you are holding in Victoria Park.

H. BERLIS AND S. WILLETS.—Thanks for addresses of likely new readers; paper being sent.

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

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

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

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

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*One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9. Lecture notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4 by the first post on Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.*

## Sugar Plums

We ask the indulgence of our readers for leaving some things unnoticed that might have been dealt with. But the *Freethinker* is prepared for the press on Tuesday, and unless Mr. Cohen had travelled from Glasgow overnight on Monday, some things had to be held over, and we are sure his friends would not have wished him to do the overnight journey after three arduous days.

We print this week the Annual Report of the Executive of the N.S.S. A report of the proceedings of the Conference will be published in our next issue. We are writing this from Glasgow, on Monday morning, and all that we need say of the Conference, for the moment, is that it was the most successful for many years. The discussions of the Conference were keen, intelligent, and indicated the kind of interest in the freethought move-

ment that augurs well for the future. The weather was brilliant on Sunday, but to-day (Monday) the clouds are low and threaten rain. Not a good outlook for the excursion to Loch Lomond and Loch Long, but the lakes are beautiful in all weathers.

The reception on the Saturday gave English visitors a taste of Scottish warmth and hospitality. The hall provided at the Grand Hotel was filled, and dancing, conversation, music and song robbed everyone of a sense of time, until the time for dispersal arrived. Then every one felt that the gathering ought to have begun earlier and ended later. There were some brief speeches from Mr. Cohen, Mr. Hamilton, the President of the Glasgow Branch, Mrs. Whitefield, and others; music and songs of excellent quality from Mr. and Mrs. Mair and their daughter, Mrs. McLean, and pianoforte solos from Mr. Copland. If the bull may be permitted, it all made one wish that the Annual Conference occurred more frequently.

The Public Demonstration on Sunday evening, in the McLellan Galleries, was an unequivocal success. The large hall and galleries were quite filled, and the eight speakers offered a balance, each fitting the other, that could not have been better had everything been carefully rehearsed. There was not a dull moment during the whole of the evening. When the President dismissed the meeting, we are certain that the audience filed out feeling that it had spent an enjoyable evening, and had taken part in an inspiring performance. Yes, the Conference of 1938 was a complete success. These paragraphs are being dispatched before the Civic Reception by the Lord Provost and Corporation of Glasgow takes place. An account of this will be given next week.

In the course of a recent public meeting Ex-Dean Inge thought it "horrible" that an Anglican Bishop should say anything in defence of the Government of Spain. The reference was to the Bishop of Chelmsford, who had visited Spain and had given his experiences and conclusions concerning his visit. In the *Times* of recent date, the Bishop deals "faithfully" with the crusted torism of Dr. Inge. He administers a rare "swipe" when he reminds the ex-Dean that the Spain Dr. Inge talked about, that of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, was also the Spain of Philip the Second and Torquemada, which explains much. He also cites the following from Mr. Fensworth, of the *New York Times*—one of America's most responsible papers, and which evidently bears out the Bishop's own experiences. The article was written on March 23 last:—

It is not a fact that there remain no churches in Barcelona fit for worship. I could name various churches, beginning with the Cathedral. . . . The restoration of religious worship has been going on quietly without any attempt to impress anyone. . . . It is not a fact, as it is stated to be, that the Government "liquidated the clergy." It is a fact that the Government, through numerous officials, often at great danger to themselves, helped hundreds if not thousands, of clergy and nuns safely to leave the country or find a haven. It is not a fact, as it is stated to be, that "the Bishop of Barcelona was executed some months after the beginning of the present war." It is a fact that he was saved through the instrumentality of the Catalan Government. It is not a fact that in Barcelona all the priests are in hiding or in close surveillance. They live as freely as any other men. . . . It is a fact . . . that certain Catholic spokesmen and organs have been perturbed because a supposed anti-God Government refused to sanction religious worship. Can it also be a fact (for on that point I confess to misgiving) that they are likewise perturbed to learn that the Government is not anti-God, and insists even in the midst of Franco's terror on sanctioning and protecting religious worship?

These statements are categorical enough, but we do not imagine they will be effective in preventing the appeal to religious bigotry being made. To impartial students the one clear thing about Spain is that the Church and the Spanish aristocracy have for generations stood for all that was retrogressive, intolerant, and rapacious in the country. And when religious bigotry and financial interests are in close alliance one may expect anything.

Mr. G. Whitehead will spend a week in Nelson commencing from to-day (June 12), and with the local N.S.S. Branch will hold meetings each evening. One of the advantages of the meetings is that Pioneer Press publications may be obtained on the spot thus saving time and trouble over post or orders through newsagents. Unattached saints within range are asked to help by making the meetings known, and by bringing their orthodox friends.

Under the title *The Strange Case of Major Vernon*, the National Council for Civil Liberties publish a useful booklet of importance to our readers. Major Vernon served this country in various capacities during the war, Naval Air Force, chiefly, and was engaged in the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough until his dismissal towards the end of last year. While away in August his home was broken into by four men, who claimed to be Fascists. Charged at the police court the accused men said their object had been in search of papers to expose Vernon as a traitor, an object which did not prevent their taking away a watch, a telescope, a travelling rug and other articles. The "papers" taken away consisted of some Socialist and Communist literature, publications of the Union of Democratic Control, etc. In the end Major Vernon was dismissed the service. The police court evidence is fully given, and there can be little doubt in the mind of an impartial reader that the complaint against Major Vernon was that he was not Conservative enough or Fascist enough. He was taking too much interest in "Left" literature, when he ought to have been soaking himself in its opposite. Theoretically civil servants are free to hold any opinions—as are teachers. But everyone knows that "advanced" opinions are more or less counted as a disqualification to advancement in both cases. In Major Vernon's case it led to his discharge. We are not even consistent in our methods of intolerance. *The Strange Case of Major Vernon* is by way of becoming an historical document. It can be obtained from The Council of Civil Liberties, 320 Regent Street, price threepence, by post fourpence.

Pastor Fred Efemez, of Dover, suggests that all Christians in Dover should spend one whole night of "united prayer" in order to counteract the influence of the "Godless Conference." But why this organized prayer? Does God need the help or the advice of Dover "soles" to look after himself? Is it possible that he doesn't know there is a "Godless Conference" that will be held? Or does he know and doesn't care the proverbial "tuppenny damn" whether it is held or not? And why the united prayer at night? Does Mr. Efemez think that as the air will be quieter at night the sound of the united prayer will travel better? Or is it that God is so busy during the day that he has more leisure to listen to Dover than he has in the daytime? Mr. Efemez is funny, he does not mean to be, but he is.

Mr. L. Raymond writes asking whether Mr. Cohen ever thinks of writing his life. We do not think he is likely to attempt it. So far as concerns the public, here are a few facts. Mr. Cohen gave his first address from a Free-thought platform in August, 1880. He joined the N.S.S. about a year later. He has been writing in the *Freethinker* regularly since 1897, and editing it formally since 1915, and more or less informally, some eighteen months before that date. He was elected President of the N.S.S. directly after the death of G. W. Foote in 1915. Mr. Cohen achieves seventy years of age on September 1 of this year. For continuous service on the Free-thought platform he holds the record, and for continuous writing for the same paper, we think a world record. That is all about his life that matters—so far as the public is concerned. He took up the work of a Free-thought propagandist because he felt an interest in the job, and has stuck to it for the same reason. But he has never converted himself into either a professional writer or speaker, and although he has contributed to many papers besides the *Freethinker*, he has never sought entrance to them. These are all the things that concern the public.

(Continued from page 375)

journing until the Executive had time to consider the matter. Your President paid two visits to Edinburgh, interviewed counsel, and a line of defence was decided on. The President was also present at the trial, and was, indeed, the only witness examined. The trial was again adjourned, and shortly after the Society's legal representative in Edinburgh was informed that the Procurator-Fiscal had withdrawn the case. It may safely be assumed that the case would not have ended so quickly or favourably had not the Society taken action. It is a pity that the case did not go to judgment, but it was not within our power to decide that point.

A word here may be said as to future attempts to use the Shop Hours Act, whether in Scotland or elsewhere. The Society's case rested partly on the consideration that any interference with the right to sell suitable literature—that is literature which is plainly a furtherance of the purposes of an organization—is interference with and curtailment of the right of propaganda. The meeting is not held for the sake of selling literature; that might be construed by a court as a commercial undertaking. The sale of literature should be considered an enlargement or continuation of the propaganda, and conducted as though it is such.

For this reason the Executive advises Branches that at open-air meetings, precautions should be taken that the literature sold is in line with the avowed purposes of the Society, and not to the consideration that the literature is in behalf of a worthy object. There are many worthy and important purposes that lie outside our Society, and which may be believed in by a number of our members; we are concerned only with such things as fall within the scope of our avowed objects. Selected literature which clearly expresses the aims of the Society only should be offered for sale in the open-air, and the Executive suggests that the Branches should appoint someone who would be responsible for seeing that proper care is taken. The Society must not be saddled with the responsibility—however worthy the object—for propaganda which is no part of its legitimate business. Where meetings are held in a hall a much greater latitude may be shown. But if our open-air propaganda is to do the most good, it must be confined within its proper limits, and conducted with discretion and a full sense of responsibility.

Cases in which the right to affirm is either denied or those who ask to do so are submitted to insults or a quite unwarrantable cross examination, still occur with tolerable frequency in the lower courts. It should be distinctly understood that the right to affirm is not a favour granted by a magistrate, a judge or anyone before whom it is necessary to give evidence or to make any kind of declaration. It is an absolute statutory right which belongs to all. The presiding officer or Judge is entitled to ask one question only, "On what ground?" The Act gives two grounds on which the demand to affirm may be made, that of the oath being contrary to witness's religious belief, or that he has no religious belief. Having asked that, no further questioning ought to take place, and the witness should respectfully decline to answer any further question. It is important that Freethinkers all over the country should avail themselves of this legal right on every occasion. It is both an evidence of their intellectual sincerity, and an act of propaganda inasmuch as it makes clear to the general public that the purely superstitious act of taking an oath is no longer legally necessary for those who wish to dispense with it. Where difficulties occur full particulars should at once be reported to the Society's headquarters.

Another matter to which the Executive wishes to call the attention of Freethinkers, whether belonging

to this Society or not, is the importance of withdrawing their children from religious instruction in State-supported schools. There is no desire to convert children into instruments of propaganda, but there is no justification for parents who do not themselves believe in religious doctrines permitting their children to be made the helpless victims of propaganda by school instruction in religion. If Freethinkers who do not withdraw their children are not helping to make Christians, they are certainly not giving their offspring an object lesson that might be given them of the importance of opinion in life. It means also that much of our work has to be done over again with each generation. Certainly the child who, in its early years, receives an object lesson of the importance of opinion is more likely to develop into a useful citizen than is one who is left without such education. Again no questioning should be made, and no answers should be given. It is the legal right of the parent or guardian of a child to have it withdrawn from religious instruction. All that is necessary is a note to the head teacher requesting that this shall be done. Where it is not done or difficulties placed in the way, the Executive is ready to advise and to give any assistance it can.

Death has taken its usual toll of our members during the period dating from the issue of the last Report. Two of these names, W. Heaford and A. B. Moss, carry us well back into the days of the Bradlaugh struggle. With both tongue and pen, on the platform and by means of articles and pamphlets they fought for many years without reward other than the satisfaction that came from forwarding a Cause they loved. They left an example to the younger generation that they may well copy, but in spirit can hardly better. The death of T. N. Robertson, of Glasgow, also removed from our midst one who had played a very prominent part in the history of the Glasgow Branch. For many years he held office in the Branch, and had to the end of his life the confidence and respect of all who knew him. Tolerant in his outlook and uncompromising in opinion, he possessed a balance of intellect and character that commanded the respect of all. W. J. W. Masterbrook was a figure familiar at Society gatherings for many years. His experience in the Freethought party dated back to the early 'eighties, and his interest in the movement never lagged. Freethought had few followers more devoted to its service, or who served it with greater singleness of aim. Another reminder of the more stormy days of our movement was J. R. Holmes. Of late years he was chiefly remembered as having been one of the front line workers in the Malthusian movement. W. B. Columbine, A. Hyatt, W. S. Clogg, and Mrs. E. Adams are among many others whose passing leaves gaps in the lives of the older members of the Freethought movement. The present generation has much to thank these men and women for. The consequences of their lives and work is seen in the wider outlook that lies open to the generation that has succeeded them.

It is some compensation for the loss of those named to note the proportion of young people, of both sexes, with which this Society is gaining contact. This is observable in both the attendances at meetings and in the membership list. It must be remembered that these members enter our Society without any inquisition beyond that of being required to give a general adherence to the printed Principles and Objects. In these circumstances it is not surprising that some of our members are inclined to place too individual an interpretation upon exactly what this Society stands for. There is no insinuation here of deliberate disloyalty to the Society, at worst it is that of zeal un-

tempered by adequate comprehension of the aims of this organization.

The Executive has no desire to initiate a heresy hunt. It strongly deprecates any such thing. There must be a certain elasticity in our platform policy, but there must be a loyal adherence to our essential aims if the work is to proceed satisfactorily. There is no need to ban any subject from an occasional hearing on our platform, and the historic attitude of this Society has been to offer an occasional welcome to all forms of opinion to which we, as an organization, are not committed—to some of which we are, as a Society, strongly opposed. But this practice must be kept within reasonable limits. There is an obvious difference between inviting an occasional address on a political, or other subject, and permitting a speaker to proclaim his opinions in such a way as to lead to the impression that he is voicing the opinions of the Society. It is in view of these circumstances that the Executive believes it advisable to make it quite clear just where we stand.

This Society has always been, and should remain, a purely voluntary association in the fullest sense of the term. It does not and cannot use the lure of immediate, direct and material gain to attract either members or speakers, and it is unable to inflict penalties of any kind, save that of removing a member's name from our books. It may also be noted that we draw our members, and also our supporters—who form a very much larger and a more important body than is generally known—from all sections of society and from nearly all shades of political and social opinion. It follows from this that a certain freedom of movement must be permitted, and there must be a liberality of mind towards conflicting views of life, along with general agreement on our main principles. The task of judging when and where the line has been crossed is not an easy one to draw, but good-will should make it easy to deal with such difficulties as may arise.

It must also again be emphasized that this Society takes no part in politics and has no political programme. It is from this direction that most complaints come, and they are complaints that should have no ground for their existence. Whatever incursions into the field of politics the Society may make is not in the interests of a political party, but to realize such things as the separation of religion from the modern State, to protest against preferential treatment of religious sects, to secure an amendment of law and custom that will permit every citizen to spend Sunday in uninterrupted enjoyment of such amenities of life as are customary on other days, to abolish such relics of mediævalism as Blasphemy Laws, and to remove all unreasonable restrictions on speech and publication. These are not political aims, even though for their achievement political action may be needed. They embody the demand for a free life, for the abolition of State favouritism, and of all penalties for opinion.

Our work is in this direction mainly a liberative one. Our insistence is, in the main, on three principles. First, that man's chief concern, and the only profitable one, is concerned with this life and his relations to his fellow-men, and not to some imagined future existence and some imaginary deity. Second, that in the conduct of life the one sane and safe test is the bearing of conduct, in its immediate and remote consequences, on human welfare. There is no other reasonable test. And, thirdly, if we are to make the most of our capacities and opportunities, there must be the fullest equal freedom of thought, speech and action, with the equality of all before the law. These have been the principles that have inspired and guided the Freethought movement for the past century and a quarter, and these principles remain unchanged to-day.

On taking a general survey of the situation it must be admitted that the threat to intellectual freedom is greater to-day than it has been at any time during the past two centuries. The retrogressive consequences of the War, and of the Peace, have not yet worked themselves out. Social, political and intellectual tyranny is in the saddle in many countries, and in our own country this has been made the excuse of legislation and action, which may become a very serious threat to liberty instead of mere pin-pricks. Long ago the founder of this Society, Charles Bradlaugh, said that the final struggle would be between the Roman Catholic Church and Atheism. Events have proven the essential truth of that prophecy, but on a wider scale. The sinking of even nineteenth century nationalism into a pathologic tribalism, the sanction given by dictatorships to exhibitions of brutality, not merely against ordinary men and women, but against those eminent in art, science, and literature, is an enthronement of the beast in man, an exhibition of retrogression that a couple of generations ago would have been considered a sheer impossibility; all this has raised the more general issue of freedom versus tyranny to one of the most important issues before the world.

Fortunately, modern conditions are such that no country, however well guarded its frontiers, can completely shut itself off from the influence of the outside world. And right through the history of the world, absolute tyranny has been shown to be incapable of perpetuating itself. Absolute power wedded to absolute tyranny always proves a barren marriage. Even freedom itself may be lost in the routine of custom, unless we are continually alive to the demand of a yet greater freedom that is born of previous upward steps, to the great lesson that freedom is something that is always to be secured, never something upon which we can say has been finally achieved.

It is for this higher conception of human freedom that our movement stands. Persistence in the struggle for it implies a rare consistency of outlook, an exhibition of that larger unselfishness which finds its best reward in the consciousness of good work faithfully carried out. The freedom we fight for is that which gives man the right, and imposes on him the obligation to follow wherever and however he sees it; which asserts that to question existing customs and institutions it is not merely a right that all men should have, but that it is their duty to do so whenever they believe it necessary. So long as we represent these ideals we will be doing a work that society can only hamper or suppress at its peril.

## Elementary Apologetics

ON one of the very few occasions when I visited Hyde Park and listened to the speakers, I heard—to my surprise—a cultured accent on the Christian Evidence Society's platform. Its raucous and illiterate representatives repel anybody with even a modicum of taste; so on this occasion, like George Robey, I stopped, I looked, and I listened. It was, however, only a question of a few moments to discover that while the manner was different, the matter was much the same. The speaker was the Rev. Clement F. Rogers, M.A., and if it had not been an invariable rule of mine never to heckle a Hyde Park speaker, I should have had no difficulty in questioning almost every statement made by him in his attack on the Secularist position.

Mr. Rogers has now published the substance of some of his addresses, under the title of *Verify Your References*, and a most entertaining volume it is. Let me

give him credit, however, for an instructive essay on "Methods of Controversy," a good deal of which is sound common sense. I do so with all the more pleasure because in the course of his book Mr. Rogers breaks I don't know how many of his own rules. Religious controversy has never been particularly nice—at least from the religious side; and *Verify Your References* is not much of an advance in manner, and certainly no advance at all in matter on scores of similar publications.

It seems to be an obsession with some Christians not to take a general view of the opposition case, but to search for "mistakes" of reference. The famous Richard Bentley, extremely angry with Anthony Collins, for example, made a determined onslaught on the latter's *Discourse of Freethinking*, and scored a few points by showing some errors of wrong translation and misunderstanding of ancient authors. In his second edition Collins put some of these things right, and his book still stands as an excellent presentation of his case. The mistakes did not affect the general argument. Another example of this kind of criticism is shown in Dr. Lightfoot's so-called "famous" reply to *Supernatural Religion*. So angry was the Christian apologist that an "infidel" could quote Greek and Latin with the ease of the most accomplished scholars in the Church, that he bent all his energies to discover where Cassels had got a tense wrong, or had given a wrong reference. The weighty arguments against miracles and the Resurrection he calmly put on one side. Lightfoot naturally found a few errata in a big work of more than 1,000 pages, and triumphantly turned round to his colleagues as if he had scored a tremendous victory, and had settled *Supernatural Religion* for ever. Cassels corrected the few mistakes in his next edition, and the book and its tremendous indictment against the "supernatural" still remain. It has never been answered. Mr. Rogers, who obviously has never read it, says the "book was only important because it introduced to the general reader the current theories of the Tübingen school of Biblical criticisms, which have long since been discarded." That is partly true, but it went on a line of its own, for Cassels showed that the Gospels as we have them today were unknown before the year 150 A.D. That position stands to this day quite unassailable—as do Cassels' arguments against miracles in general, and the one upon which Christianity rests—the Resurrection—in particular. Mr. Rogers talks as if there was no controversy about the date of the Gospels. For him the argument is dead—"it belonged to a time long since settled." It did—in favour of the Secularist position. As a matter of fact Christian books are continually being published dealing with the problem of the Gospels; and not all the ingenuity of conjecture that their authors can hazard has succeeded in dislodging the position taken up by *Supernatural Religion*. The desperate attempts to find a "Q" document or many "Q" documents behind our Gospels surely is proof of the fact that the problem is not settled by a long, long way.

Mr. Rogers gets many questions hurled at him in the Park from Secularists, and he answers them in the book as if they represented our ripest scholarship. His peevish replies must really make any serious student laugh. Surely the Freethought position should be studied in the many admirable books written by representative Freethinkers, and not through questions which very often are only made in Hyde Park to raise a laugh or a crowd? It is true that Mr. Rogers does mention the work of John M. Robertson—but only with a childish sneer as if books like *Pagan Christ* and *Christianity and Mythology* were worth absolutely nothing. He must trust his Christian readers to take his word about them; it is quite inconceivable that

anybody with the infantile mind of the average believer would even understand Robertson's argument. Let me show, for instance, how little Mr. Rogers himself knows what that argument means. He says:—

A good many years ago I searched through a work by one of its chief authorities to see to how many sources he attributed the origin of the Christian belief in the Virgin Birth. I found that he thought that it *might* at least be attributed to Jewish prophecy, to unknown Jewish tradition, to Buddhism, to Egyptian sources, to a Babylonian origin, to Phrygian cults, to Persian beliefs, to later Mithraism, to Greek mythology, to unknown Eleusinian mysteries, to spontaneous growth, to the invention of Our Lord's parents or of his disciples, to the teaching of Plato, and to legends of the birth of Plato and Augustus. How the evangelist found time and opportunity to scour the world for these "same stories" condense them into a simple, coherent narrative redolent of the soil of Palestine, and to cover up all traces of his wide research the learned author did not explain.

It really is difficult to deal with such an "argument" in any seriousness. What was Robertson's object in calling attention to the multitude of Virgin Birth and similar stories which had been current in the East for centuries? That he did it with such thoroughness was characteristic of the man and his work. Was it not because it was necessary once for all to trace these myths to their sources as far as it was possible, and to show that there was nothing surprising in the first Christian writers eventually tacking on to the story of their God hero the same kind of supernatural birth which accompanied other gods in more or less the same form? The idea that Robertson wanted us to believe that Luke went to all the sources is nonsense; it is not even suggested by Robertson. But Luke re-produced the Virgin Birth myth in a form of his own, and it would be difficult to give the palm to any other writer for more drivel. The "simple, coherent narrative redolent of the Palestinian soil" is a phrase that would be hard to beat for downright childishness. Most Christian apologists would give their right hand not to be called upon to defend the supremely silly story of "an angel of the Lord" talking to Zacharias and later to Mary, as related by Luke; or in Matthew, the story of an angel appearing to Joseph in a dream. I should like Mr. Rogers to explain this beautiful story—just how does an angel appear to anyone in a dream? Is it a real angel, or a dream one? Or is it all a "mystery" which only the pure in heart can understand?

Frankly, I have rarely read a book in which so much childishness and so little knowledge of the Free-thought position alternates with so much peevishness. Is this the best that the S.P.C.K. can do in combating our propaganda? Over and over again I came across arguments which would have disgraced a schoolboy. And the curious thing is that even in the "verifying" of his own references Mr. Rogers shows his complete inability to avoid mistakes. He quotes page 449 of *Christianity and Mythology*, but his quotation is not in my copy; nor is the quotation from page 401. If Mr. Rogers has used a particular edition, he should have said so. He says that the work of translating Strauss' *New Life of Jesus*, in 1865, "played so important a part in the life of George Eliot." As a matter of fact George Eliot translated *Leben Jesu* in 1846, and Mr. Rogers gets so hopelessly confused that he also calls it a *Life of Christ*.

Finally one gets a little tired of the old and dead Christian Evidence argument, that because we have the writings of Pliny, Plato, and other classical writers, we should not doubt the existence of Jesus or the authenticity of the Gospels. No one, not even Mr. Rogers, believes that Plato was born of a virgin;

yet the evidence for this is quite as strong as that for Jesus, angels and all. I can quite understand the irritation of such a Fundamentalist as Mr. Rogers when faced with the arguments of those of us who disbelieve in the existence of Jesus. Those arguments have to be faced, however, and by theologians who are a little better equipped than speakers for the Christian Evidence Society. And even they will only be able to speak with authority when they produce *evidence*, and not just mere eyewash or "spiritual" talk.

H. CUTNER.

### The Dutch Blasphemy Trial

READERS may recall that a year ago the then Minister of Justice in Holland brought a charge of blasphemy against Heer Hoving and his paper the *Vrijdenker*, and that this case was carried through three courts, all three of which gave judgment in favour of our fellow Freethinker. Recently a new charge of blasphemy has been brought against Heer Hoving on account of an article which appeared in the *Vrijdenker*, written by a Belgian Freethinker, Bonsels. In this article doubt as to the virginity of the Virgin was implied, and disapproval openly expressed of the exploitation of the faithful in the matter of the miracles of Beauraing, which made some stir last year in Belgium. The present Minister of Justice is a Catholic, but much apparently will depend on the interpretation of the Dutch Law of Blasphemy, for it has been laid down in the Dutch Courts that it is not blasphemy unless the Deity is specifically scoffed at. Disapproval of Christian opinions, customs and festivities does not constitute blasphemy.

Whatever may be the result of the trial, the aim of the Catholics is clear. Trials cannot be defended without expense, and frequent trials of this kind will strain the financial resources of the President of the Dagraad and his friends.

As we have seen recently in this country there is nothing to which the pious will not stop in their spite against the Seeker after Truth.

Our latest news is that the Haarlem Court has condemned Herr Hoving to two months imprisonment. Hoving has lodged an appeal.

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.

### Satanic Soliloquy

#### HISTORIC REMARKS

LITTLE DAVID: Anybody want a fight?

Solomon: Meet the wives.

Jehovah: I think I'll take a rest.

Satan: Eat more fruit.

Sampson: That was a close shave.

Cain: It was self-defence.

Adam: I didn't want to do it.

Mary (to Joseph): It's a boy!

#### ENTER THE GODS

Who invented the first of the gods, appointed himself the terrestrial agent thereof, and thus contrived to lure his fellow men out of the frying-pan of uncertainty into the hell-fire of religion? God only knows! But this first priest, it may be assumed, in due course acquired apprentices to assist him in his ghostly trade. And these apprentices, no doubt, eventually set up in business on their own account. . . . At first, I dare say, an attempt was made to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort and the introduction of unfair competition. Thus, one newly-fledged priest established himself as the sole representative of the god who regulated the movements of the sun and moon. Another advertised a much envied ability to ensure that night was followed by day. A third undertook the cure of cancer, gallstones, and housemaid's knee. A fourth controlled the weather, fertility, and the tides. In effect, the high gods multiplied. Thereafter, other rising young priests who aspired independently to control the weather, or cure cancer, or make day follow

night, or harness the sun and moon, were encouraged—may, required—to seek their fortunes elsewhere, and practise their chosen brands of magic in pastures new.

Thus the movement gradually spread to the furthest ends of the earth, and we may be sure that it was not long before the use of the priestly services, from being optional and obtainable for a modest fee, became compulsory—an indispensable favour granted in return for a life of Zionic ease, plus a tenth of all profits, plus anything else the priests could lay their hands on. The rise of our now perfected Christian civilization had begun.

#### THE CHRISTIAN CREDO

That only God can make a tree.

That two wrongs make a right.

That the Faith, despite its present decline, is destined ultimately to overcome the world.

P. E. CLEATOR.

## Correspondence

### ANTI-RELIGION ON THE RATES

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

SIR,—In Motion 18 on the Agenda, which was placed before the N.S.S. Conference, is a reference to the "disguised endowment of religion" from civic moneys.

That such endowment is to be deplored is, I hope, the opinion of every member of the N.S.S.

How then are we to regard the covert endowment of our society by moneys levied in the general rate?

I draw a parallel between the organizations trying to sustain religious superstitions and our own which is militantly anti-religious; consequently I resent financial support for our activities coming from rates levied under pressure, largely from those in opposition to us.

I am not honoured therefore to receive an ornate gilt invitation card to be the guest of the Civic heads of Glasgow, since I am asked to make use of a room in a Municipal building, absorb refreshment, and dance to the music provided by these dignitaries from the rates of the City.

If we resist a general charge to provide for the advocacy of religion, then equally we must resist any temptation to allow anti-religion to be supported any other way than by funds voluntarily provided.

I brand those who have accepted the principle of this invitation as not merely injudicious but actually inconsistent. If, as is said in the *Freethinker* "Sugar Plums," May 8, p. 297, the demands for tickets exceed the supply, I take this to mean that considerable numbers of our members are prepared to be illogical if a dole meal is in sight, and that given the opportunity, their morality would disappear as did that of our erstwhile colleagues Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Company.

I regard this as an unpardonable defection from principle, and hope even now that this part of the Official programme can be cancelled, failing which, to save our face, I demand that the fair cost of this entertainment be defrayed from N.S.S. funds.

We lay claim to a high purpose, do not let it appear on our Archives that we can turn into political place seekers, even for one brief evening.

DON FISHER.

### MISSIONARIES AS TRADERS

SIR,—I observe that in your issue of May 29, you say that in a wireless address (described wrongly but characteristically as an appeal for the International Missionary Society—a non-existent body), I fail to mention the "vast trading connexions" opened up by missionaries.

Accusations of this kind can be made with impunity in so much that they are so vague that it is impossible to lay hold of their inherent falsity. I will content myself by giving a general and wholehearted denial of your statement, and challenge you to produce any evidence which would even begin to justify your remarks.

WILLIAM PATON.

## Branch News

### EDINBURGH BRANCH

THE Edinburgh Branch can congratulate itself on a real good piece of work accomplished the week of the Assembly of the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh. We have had bumper meetings with the exception of Saturday, which was too wet. On Sunday Mr. Copland of Glasgow opened the campaign and was well received. Mrs. Whitefield, on Tuesday and Friday, so rattled the Christians that she barely caught the last train back to Glasgow. But the joy of the week was when our advertising was successful in getting a real live Minister of the Church of Scotland to debate on "Science or Jesus will Save You and the World." This drew a crowd unique in Edinburgh, and resulted in our propaganda getting more publicity and results than ever before. Mr. T. L. Smith closed the campaign on Sunday with splendid success.

One result is a real good story. One of our sympathizers was in a newsagent's shop and saw a copy of the *Freethinker* on the counter, and asked who in his neighbourhood got that paper. Said naive shopkeeper, "That's a Religious Paper." "How come?" said our friend. Reply: I saw a notice of a meeting in it where the SAINTS are asked to support the meeting wholeheartedly. Result: collapse of sympathizer.—F.S.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

### LONDON

#### INDOOR

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, Herbert Read, M.A., D.Litt.—"The Revival of Anarchism."

#### OUTDOOR

BETHNAL GREEN AND HACKNEY BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 6.30, Mr. G. F. Green—A Lecture.

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Place): 7.30, Mr. Saphin.

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

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Brockwell Park): 6.30, Miss E. Millard. Rushcroft Road, opposite Brixton Town Hall, 8.0, Tuesday, Mr. L. Ebury. Cock Pond, Clapham Old Town, 8.0, Friday, Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST HAM BRANCH (Corner of Deanery Road, Water Lane, Stratford): 7.0, Mr. R. H. Rosetti—A Lecture.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 3.30, Sunday, Miss E. Millard, M.A., Messrs. E. Bryant and G. Barnes. 6.30, Messrs. Bryant, Barnes and Tuson. Wednesday, 7.30, Mr. W. B. Collins. Thursday, 7.30, Mr. E. C. Saphin and Mrs. N. Buxton. Friday, 7.30, Mr. G. Barnes.

### COUNTRY

#### OUTDOOR

BIRKENHEAD (Wirral) BRANCH N.S.S. (Haymarket): 8.0, Saturday—A Lecture.

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

CHESTER-LE-STREET (The Bridge): 8.0, Friday, Mr. J. T. Brighton—"Profits and Prophets."

EDINBURGH BRANCH DEBATING FOURSOME (Mound): 7.0, "That Christ Lives." *Affir.*: Rev. Kernohan and another member of the Church of Scotland (Official). *Neg.*: Mrs. Whitefield, Glasgow N.S.S. and Mr. F. Smithies, Edinburgh N.S.S.

NELSON (Chapel Street): 8.0, Wednesday, Mr. J. Clayton.

NORTH ORMESBY (Market): 7.0, Wednesday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

NORTH SHIELDS (Harbour View): 7.0, Tuesday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

SABDEN: 7.0, Thursday, Mr. J. Clayton.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Gill Bridge): 7.0, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

TEESIDE BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Cross, High Street, Stockton): 7.0, A Lecture.

WORSTHORNE: 7.15, Friday, Mr. J. Clayton.

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