

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED *by* CHAPMAN COHEN •

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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Freethought and Christian Values—The Editor</i>	- - 801
<i>The Passing of Mumbo-Jumbo—Mimnermus</i>	- - 802
<i>A Dire and Delestable Disease—T. F. Palmer</i>	- - 803
<i>Mr. Bernard Shaw's Paragon on Punishment— Bayard Simmons</i>	- - - 805
<i>A Life's Last Phase—J. M. Stuart-Young</i>	- - - 810
<i>Being Peculiar—T. H. Elstob</i>	- - - 812
<i>Problem of Colouring in Animals—Don Fisher</i>	- - - 813
<i>Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, Letters to the Editor, etc.</i>	

Views and Opinions

Freethought and Christian Values

WHEN I commenced my career as a Freethought propagandist there were two stock Christian stories that one met. One was the dying infidel shrieking for Christ to save him, and elaborately recanting his published unbelief, the other, the famous watch story in which the unbeliever pulled out a watch and challenged God to prove his existence by striking him (the unbeliever) dead in three minutes. Both stories were very old, although the last had a peculiarly Christian flavour about it. I have met with the rebel against God hurling defiance against God in Paganism, but I think the story of the death-bed conversion is only as old as the earliest Christian liar, and that goes back to the early days of the Christian religion. There does not appear to have been much scope for this death-bed story in the pre-Christian religions, and none at all with very primitive religious believers. It is true that a great many superstitions have gathered round the fact of death in all ages, but the fear is of the dead, not of the fact of dying. Natural death is actually a discovery that does not exist until a certain stage of mental development is reached. To the most primitive peoples death is just a passing on. It takes a certain strength of mind for anyone to think of non-existence, and that is, scientifically, what happens at death. Death to the savage is a product of magic, and with that goes a very long and a very tangled story.

I do not think that any religion has ever made such a sheer terror of death as did Christianity. From the outset death was a frightful and fearsome thing. It was the beginning of eternal bliss or eternal torment, and, as Christianity developed, the certainty of hell for the vast majority became greater. The Christian was always preparing, but never ready, for death; and the poorest character was the most certain of salvation. If a man believed he was bound to go to heaven,

while the majority of his fellows would take the other road, well and good. In practice the bigger the brute the more certain might he be of salvation. If the Christian happened to be of a sensitive nature, and intellectually above his fellow-believers, he would more probably die in fear concerning his destiny. The wife-beater, the child-torturer, the murderer, were not likely to be so fearful. These might rely upon the pardon granted the thief on the cross as a precedent, and upon the gospel of the great Spurgeon that "great sinners shall have as much joy as the greatest saints. Thirty years of sin shall be forgiven, and it shall not take thirty minutes to do it." No more cheerful gospel ever entered the condemned cell. God was no respecter of persons. It was worshippers he wanted; quality did not matter. Without worship the gods wither and die.

* * *

Wait till You Die!

So Christianity became in practice a method of teaching men how to die. The test was the way in which one faced death. The least important thing in a man's career became to the Christian of vital consequence. His job was to save his soul from damnation, even though he had a soul that was never worth a damn. "Wait until you die," was the message the Christian flung at the Freethinker, and he also provided death-bed scenes, where the Freethinker died shrieking for Jesus to save him. I was not surprised by the Christian acting and talking as he did. What surprised me was the attitude of so many Freethinkers towards it. They argued solemnly that these stories were lies, that the Freethinker could face death as fearlessly as any Christian, and even procured documentary evidence to prove that the unbeliever died "altee samee clistian."

Personally I never troubled seriously to contradict these ancient Christian fables. I knew that seriously to argue against them was to convince Christians of their value and probable truth. I knew they were lies and said so. I also explained that I didn't care to the value of a brass button whether they were true or not. My concern was how Freethinkers lived, not how they died. I was even willing to grant that every Freethinker that ever lived, did now live or would live in the future, would die howling for Jesus to save him, and then proposed getting on with the more important question "Is Christianity true?" Every Freethinker knew quite well that there were quite a number of things that determined how a man died. Every Freethinker knew that the important question for man was life, not death, and that death meant simply—nothing at all. He knew that all the talk about facing death bravely was a survival of superstition concerning what came after death. He knew also that he would have as little cause for troubling about what happens to him after he was dead, as there was to trouble about what had happened to him

before he was born. He knew all this, and yet argued as though he was still in the Christian camp. Why? Before answering that question let us consider the other Christian lie I have mentioned.

* * *

Challenging God

There are stories of men challenging the gods in Greek mythology, but that belongs to an advanced stage of theology, or, one ought to say, to a more developed social sense. Christianity was a reversion to a lower type of religious belief, and the farthest it got was disobedience to God, or neglect of God. To defy the Gods in the name of man was too intellectually heroic for Christianity. But the Freethinker had to be depicted as something revolting to the slave mentality of the Christian, and it quite unintentionally presented the Atheist as one of sufficiently heroic stature to defy God. But even then it had to be presented in a stupid way, for it made the man who did not believe in God challenging him to prove his existence by killing his challenger.

When I came along the figure around whom this story gathered was Charles Bradlaugh. At one of his meetings Bradlaugh had pulled out a watch and gave God, if he existed, three minutes to prove it by striking him (Bradlaugh) dead. The Christian told the tale in tones of undiluted horror, the Freethinker listened with an indignation that he could hardly suppress. I met this story much as I had met the death-bed one. I was not surprised at a Christian lying for the greater glory of God, I expected it. I didn't even bother to tell the Christian he was a liar. That information would probably have been unnecessary to his friends and useless to his enemies. I just said that three minutes seemed a long time to take over so simple a job, when a mere mortal armed with a "cheap and chippy chopper" could have done it in as many seconds. It looked like a reflection upon the efficiency of God. In any case, as Bradlaugh had not asked God to prove his existence by striking the Archbishop of Canterbury dead, the whole matter seemed to be one that concerned God and Bradlaugh, and if God did nothing, the Christian need not trouble himself in the matter. All I could suggest to the Christian was that as God did nothing in any other direction he might use the fact of his doing nothing to Bradlaugh as a proof of the existence of God since he was running true to form. His behaviour was all of a piece.

Again the story that an Atheist should seriously propose testing the existence of God by challenging him to strike someone dead was one that could only enter the head of a Christian of a rather poor mental type. But the story was common enough, although it usually took the form of the wicked unbeliever doing something religiously shocking and being blinded or paralyzed as a consequence. As a matter of fact, and in any case, the Atheist was only asking for the application of a test that Christians had themselves used very freely. For they had in such things as the trial by ordeal, the invocation of God to punish one if he swore falsely, and in numerous other such cases, really applied a pragmatic test to the belief. The alleged challenge of the Atheist differed only in its being more courageous and more straightforward.

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The Grip of the Past

But it was not the Christian I was really concerned with so much as the Atheist. He took the charges too seriously. He was far too concerned in proving that the stories were not true. He rejected the death-bed conversion as a reflection upon the quality of Freethought, and repudiated the challenge to God as though that there were something that to him was substantially different from challenging a mythical

giant of Anderson's fairy tales to mortal combat. It was these things that helped me to realize that when a man had taken into his system the poison of religious teaching, and particularly the poison of Christian doctrinal teaching, he could very seldom completely rid himself of its influence. Madame de Stael put the position, without intending to do so, in her famous statement, "I do not believe in ghosts, but I am afraid of them." The Freethinker was actually subscribing, without being aware of it, to the standard of Christian values.

Christians had said that the test of a man's creed was the way in which it enabled him to face death. So the Freethinker was anxious to prove that he could face death as boldly as Christians, when, as I have said, he knew nothing was more likely than when one's vitality is low and one is losing control of his faculties, acquired traits are likely to drop off in the inverse order of their acquisition. Nothing is truer than that given atrophy of, or damage to, the higher centres the better human qualities weaken, and in a lengthened illness may exist as a mere shadow of what they were.

So again with the alleged offence of challenging God. To defy God was, religiously, one of the greatest sins a man could commit. To question his existence or his power was equal to the Christian sin against the Holy Ghost. It placed the Atheist on the very lowest rung of Christian values. Intellectually the Atheist had given up this scale of values. Emotionally he was still in the grip of his early Christian teaching; and the more serious his repudiation the more he was encouraging the Christian to retain Christian values.

From the very first I treated these silly charges with the contempt they deserved, with the result that I very seldom had the same person bringing them to me more than once. One ought never to treat an opponent too lightly; on the other hand one ought never to take him too seriously. One ought to examine what one is asked to defend much as a lawyer will examine the terms of an indictment before pleading to it. I have followed this plan all my life, and now that some of these ancient Christian falsehoods have worn so thin that they are seldom used in controversy, I think that I may, after nearly fifty years of advocacy, take to myself a little credit for the change.

In succeeding articles I will give other illustrations of "How not to do it" by dealing with some arguments on a higher and more important level.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Passing of Mumbo-Jumbo

"The creed of Christendom is gradually melting away like a Northern iceberg into Southern seas."

G. W. Fools.

"You do not believe, you only believe that you believe."—S. T. Coleridge.

MUCH is said of the truly enormous output of books, of the glut of the literary market. With all the prodigious activity of writers, however, there is one notable department of literature which shows a definite falling off, both in quantity and also in quality. During the past eighty years a steady and continuous decline has taken place in the production of religious and theological books. To what is this decline due? There are several reasons; the first and the most potent being the growing indifference of the reading public to religion. The tide of religion is now at the ebb, and we only have:—

"Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear,
And naked shingles of the world."

In his day, Lord Macaulay noted, with gusto, the periodic manner in which the British public took up questions of religion and morality. John Bull no longer remembers that he has a soul to save. Indeed, he is largely indifferent as to whether he has a soul or not. Meanwhile, he reads trashy novels, light literature, and newspapers, especially if they "spot the winner," and retail rubbish. Another reason is the lower mentality of the clergy themselves. There are no longer any great ecclesiastics or notable theologians, and it certainly cannot be said that the Christian Churches show to-day any suggestion of intellect in the production of religious books. Not for present-day clergymen are the rolling harmonies of Jeremy Taylor, the subtle cadences of Milton, the chastened utterances of Coleridge. They cannot even echo Baxter or Bunyan. There is not one original idea in their books. Everything is not even second-hand, but twenty-second-hand, and threadbare. The paucity and poverty of the prose emphasize the emptiness of their heads. Yet another cause of the decline of religious literature is the diffusion of free-thought. Ordinary men and women are no longer content to be led blindly by the parson, or the curate. Even the force of Puritanism, once truly formidable, has now spent itself. It no longer inspires, but it merely irritates, chiefly in the uniform of the Salvation Army.

The real decline began sixty years ago. About that time there was a real and unmistakable interest in all forms of religious literature. The Rev. J. R. Macduff rivalled the foremost novelists in popularity. The sale of his works was to be reckoned in hundreds of thousands of copies. He was, it may be said, the "Dickens" of the religious world. For years, Dean Goulburn's books had an annual sale of many thousands, and Bishop Oxenden's works were equally popular. Newman Hall's publications ran into a sale that present-day theological writers never dream of. Spurgeon's stodgy penny sermons sold like hot-rolls for two generations, and were preached, without any acknowledgment, from countless pulpits. Dr. Joseph Parker, of the City Temple, had whole hosts of admirers who bought his books eagerly. Dean Farrar's *Life of Christ* was a best-seller, and was dubbed—by the smart lads of Fleet Street—*Cook's Excursion Through the Gospels*. In looking through the old publishers' catalogues, one is really surprised at the very large number of works of a devotional nature. Familiar as household words a generation ago, how many of these are known even by name to the present generation? The Victorian era was too largely dirty, drunken, and disreputable, but it was very pious. It was a golden age for the clergy, but it was the gold of a sunset.

Not only was there a steady and constant demand for the works of individual authors, but for such libraries as "The Biblical Cabinet," "Sacred Classics," "The Christian Family Library," and many another series. "Where are the Snows of yesterday?" The taste for such stodgy, indigestible reading has gone for ever. Nor is it to be supposed for a moment that fresh life can be given to works like Gladstone's *Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*, which actually advertised the intellectual limitations of a British Prime Minister. Why, indeed, defend the impregnable? Or a book like Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, in which ancient ignorance was re-lacquered with a jargon of scientific terms. Such works served but a temporary purpose, and, having served it, have passed from men's minds. In the many histories of Victorian literature which have appeared, no mention is made of numberless religious or devotional books, "thick as leaves in Val-lombrosa," which were once thought to be indispens-

able in tens of thousands of sheltered homes. The circumstance is highly significant, and illustrates with startling clearness the changed attitude of the reading public towards religious literature.

The real meaning of this truly enormous change in opinion is that the Christian superstition is now in the melting-pot. Everything eventually crumbles which is not true. Never in any period of history was there so little religion, never so much Secularism, as at this present time. Never have men and women attended churches and chapels so little, never have they attended meetings for social service so assiduously. Christianity, with its heaven and hell, its devils and its angels, is melting into thin air, and Secularism is slowly permeating everywhere. The Christian Superstition no longer satisfies, for no faith can satisfy which is found out. Men, nowadays, no longer accept upon priestly trust the mistaken beliefs of their remote and ignorant ancestors. Over the pulpits of the fast-emptying churches and chapels is inscribed, "To the glory of God," which being translated into plain language means, "To the glory of Priestcraft." That is the voice of the past. Secularism sounds the vibrant and triumphant note of the future, "To the Service of Mankind." Based on Oriental fables, supported by dead-men's money, trading on ignorance, Christianity at length finds the conscience of the race rising above and beyond its antiquated ignorance. The voice of reason has been a still, small voice, sometimes almost inaudible, though never quite stilled, but now it is swelling into a sound like the sea, which will, in due time, overwhelm all the machinations and chicaneries of Priestcraft.

MIMNERMUS.

A Dire and Detestable Disease

LEPROSY is a loathsome malady which has afflicted Egypt, India, China, Japan and the far Eastern Islands from remote times. Although the Scriptural term "leprosy" is ambiguous, and probably denotes several cutaneous diseases, it seems certain that true leprosy was present in ancient Israel.

So far as is known, its first appearance in Europe was made at the opening of the Christian era. Then, for nearly 1,000 years leprosy spread far and near. Its progress was accelerated by the Crusades, but whether in consequence of acquired immunity or some other undiscovered cause, its ravages decreased in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it has now become rare in Europe save in several special areas in Spain, Portugal, Sicily and other southern lands. In the north it is local in Norway, Sweden and Finland. But in many equatorial and sub-tropical regions this scourge still occasions dread. So recently as 1894, Dr. Arthur Whitelegge in his *Hygiene and Public Health*, noted that leprosy was increasing in the West Indies, Demerara, South Africa and apparently in India. Its invasion of Northern Australia and British Columbia has been attributed to Chinese immigration.

The inception of leprosy has been ascribed to the consumption of putrid fish, yet the vegetarian Hindus suffer from the disease. Personal cleanliness and better sanitation largely account for its absence in Europe and elsewhere. The infliction has never been restricted to the poverty-stricken classes, but it has ever prevailed most widely among those who lived in squalid surroundings.

Lepers numbering hundreds of thousands are segregated and shunned in the world to-day, whose

anguished feelings almost defy description. Victor Heiser, whose prolonged and patient studies of disease were reinforced by personal contact with many lepers has narrated his experiences in his *A Doctor's Odyssey* (Cape, 1937, 15s. net). This remarkable work might serve as a companion volume to Axel Munthe's highly brilliant *Story of San Michele*. But in any case Dr. Heiser concludes that: "No criminal condemned to solitary confinement is confronted with such torture and loneliness. Shunned by friends and acquaintances, who are in terror of coming within speaking distance, the unfortunate victims soon find themselves alone in a world in which they have no part. The few who come in contact with lepers instinctively draw back from them. . . . Patients when avoided by everybody sit idle and brood; a human being devoid of hope is the most terrible object in the world."

The widespread prevalence of leprosy in the Middle Ages is proved by the numerous leper hospitals that existed. In the twelfth century there were seven in London, while many thousands of these hospices were established throughout Europe. In thirteenth century France, it seems that every urban centre possessed its leper-houses, and one French King bequeathed legacies to 2,000 institutions. In Spain, Castilian Kings displayed a keen interest in leprosy as members of the ruling house were victims of the disease.

The hospitals were directed by the priesthood who administered the endowments. Wealthy lepers appear to have been paying patients. The Brother and Sister attendants, attired in leper livery, and wearing a strip of red cloth on their sleeves, thus announced their calling when they appeared in public.

Usually the hospices were reserved as retreats for opulent patients, and where no shelters were available for the poor and lowly lepers, they received little so-called Christian charity at the hands of the Church. Any ordinary person suspected as a leper was examined by an ecclesiastical judge, and when certified as leprous was expelled from human-kind. The expulsion of the sufferer was preceded by curious religious rites, including the weird ceremony of scattering a spadeful of churchyard mould over his cranium, with the priestly admonition: "My friend, this is a sign that thou art dead to the world." This was followed by the consolatory promise: *Virus iterum deo* (Thou shalt live again with God).

The leper then donned the prescribed black clothing, and the officiating priest handed him the claquettes, with which he must warn wayfarers of his approach. As a farewell benediction the ghostly father promised the afflicted all the prayers of the faithful, which would benefit him as much as if he were offering them himself in divine service conducted in a sacred edifice.

These and other observances were Christian adaptations of earlier customs. "In some districts," it is stated, "the leper at the close of the ceremony was made "to descend into an open grave in the cemetery and undergo a pretended inhumation, but more often was merely led outside the church to his cabin in the fields. Before his door was planted a cross on which the priest hung a box for alms."

At a later period lepers were allowed a modicum of liberty, and were permitted to beg in public places, while at the Easter festival it became customary for the lepers to emerge from their tomb like their divine redeemer and participate in the celebration. Customs, however, varied, and the afflicted were sometimes treated unmercifully, especially where the danger of contagion was dreaded. But these wretched creatures fared better as the years rolled on, and compassion slowly displaced dislike and fear. A

certain sanctity became associated with leprosy, and in France its victims were designated *les malades de Dieu*. The care of lepers became a cult, and those who assisted them rose high in popular esteem. Dr. Heiser observes that: "Hans Holbein painted a picture in 1516 of Elizabeth of Hungary, patron saint of Queens, succouring a group of lepers. Albrecht Dürer also treated the subject by painting the limbs of the lepers as crippled or amputated, and the skin covered with blotches like those of a leopard. It is obvious that the horror rather than the portrayal of the disease was the artists' aim since they desired to express the heroism of those who helped lepers." Also, Ambrose Paré, the pioneer of modern surgery most earnestly counselled the considerate treatment of lepers in their enforced isolation, "as they are human like others, and the deity might easily have sent the scourge to ourselves."

The causation of leprosy is ill-understood. It is not dependent on climate or the character of the soil, for it occurs on the coast, in the interior, in mountainous districts and on the plains alike. But in certain regions it appears to spread in congested areas wherever lepers exist. Although Daniellssen deemed the disease hereditary and not due to contact, the fact remains that in Nauru, a Pacific Island some twelve miles in circumference with 2,500 inhabitants, the malady speedily spread. "In 1920 there were four cases of leprosy on the island, in 1921 sixty, and in 1927 three hundred and thirty-seven, or about one in 70 of the population."

There are two main types of this repulsive ailment: the neural which displays slight external evidence, and the skin derangement which is manifested by lesions which gather on the surface tissues, and the two forms frequently appear in company. An enlargement of the ear lobe or the growth of an ulcer on the nasal septum are apt to announce the early stages of leprosy. These preliminary signs are frequently followed by red spots on the skin. The disease develops slowly, and may persist for a score or even thirty years.

In India where there are more than a million lepers, the neural or nerve variety of the malady is predominant, while the tuberculoid form flourishes in South Africa. One of the marked features of leprosy is the impairment of sensation. Dr. Heiser, whose studies in the Philippine Islands were extensive, states that he has witnessed at various times: "a lighted cigarette burning into the fingers of a leper without his being at all aware of it. Even the odour of burning flesh did not attract his attention, because the sense of smell was also gone."

Repugnant as leprosy is to its victims, the disease itself is seldom fatal. As Sir Leonard Rogers states: "The patient whose condition is extremely wretched, gradually becomes weaker, and eventually succumbs to exhaustion, or is carried off by some intercurrent disease, usually inflammation of the kidneys or tuberculosis." At Cullion a medical survey certified the mortality of lepers as due in 24 per cent of the cases to tuberculosis, while in 16 per cent death resulted from nephritis. Why, for every 100 men smitten with leprosy only half that number of women are afflicted is a problem that still awaits solution.

In the 'seventies of last century the Scandinavian doctor, Gerard Hansen, traced the origin of leprosy to the presence of a microscopic bacillus. Transmission of the disease to the lower animals has been attempted but without success. Numerous experiments have been conducted in order to isolate and secure cultures of the lepra bacillus in the laboratory, but apparently without positive results, as later bacteriological investigators have frequently failed to verify the claims made by earlier experimenters. But

unequivocal success, both in isolation and culture of the micro-organism of the malady is merely a matter of time in the opinion of many well qualified to judge.

Treatment of the horrible disease bristles with difficulties, and no certain remedy is thus far available. Better sanitary surroundings and hospital care seem to arrest the advance of the infliction and sometimes, it is said, improvement occurs without any medical treatment whatever. Sir Leonard Rogers, however, in collaboration with an Indian chemist, largely at the instance of Victor Heiser, furnished "a chaulmoogra oil preparation which halved the time of treatment."

Although the optimists who aspired to banish this scourge from mankind have met with many disappointments, much of permanent value has been accomplished. It is sad to reflect that from the dawn of history the outcast leper has endured the pangs of a living death. "Even thirty years ago," Dr. Heiser testifies, "no hope could be held out to these unfortunates, who were not permitted by unkind providence to die of their disease, but must linger for years of untold suffering and degradation. Wherever I have gone over the face of the earth I have visited colonies of lepers, and the change that has taken place is no less than marvellous. . . . The lepers now feel on the threshold of deliverance. They are patient because of the chance, however slight, that they may be once again restored to the world of men and life."

For, even if it cannot be definitely asserted that the chaulmoogra oil remedy as standardized at the Culion leper colony in the Philippines is completely curative, at least 10 per cent of the lepers recover, while 50 per cent show great improvement. The unsightly lesions vanish and the affliction's development is arrested. Ten per cent of the patients, however, it is mournful to add, remain unaffected by this treatment, while their malady grows worse and worse.

T. F. PALMER.

Mr. Bernard Shaw's Paragon on Punishment

MR. GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, an upright man walking through a crooked world, and still at eighty-two years of age happily with us and physically upright, has ever taken pains to secure his physical and monetary survival. This he does by making to himself friends of the "Mammon of Unrighteousness." There is not an outstanding despot in Europe in whom he has not observed some good, and he has taken care to say so. At the same time he has preached his leftist doctrines. If a "show-down" comes which leaves either Right or Left in sole power, G.B.S. will undoubtedly be able to claim, and with justice, that he has, at some time or other, spoken up for whichever becomes the dominant party. In other words, he has what I believe biologists call a high survival value. The Vicar of Bray has nothing on our G.B.S.

In the course of this canny policy the one-time Atheist has spoken kind words about that odious tyranny the Roman Catholic Church (see *St Joan* and *John Bull's Other Island passim*). He is not so anxious about John Bull's Other Church—the Church of England, by Law Established—for this is not so dangerous. But the Church of England has considerable social powers, which should not be forgotten by one who on occasion has to make himself comfortable in a rural retreat by taking a furnished country vicarage. Looking around for some Anglican cleric about whom to say a few kind words, Mr. Shaw has had to bear in mind, of course, that this gentleman must have two essential qualities. He must, first, be influential,

and, second, be not too obviously stupid. A Wintonington-Ingram, though high up in the hierarchy, could not possibly serve the purpose of anybody who had any reputation for intelligence to preserve, and, as we all know, intelligence and G.B.S. are synonymous terms. In the nature of things these two *desiderata* rather restrict the field of choice, but Mr. Shaw has the virtue of perseverance, or he would not occupy the eminent position he now has. At last his choice fell upon an ex-Cambridge don, one W. R. Inge, D.D., K.C.V.O., who for long was the Dean of St. Paul's, London's Cathedral.

On the whole a capital choice, which shows that Mr. Shaw's Scotch ancestry still manifests itself in his native shrewdness. It is said that Karl Marx used to say of John Stuart Mill, that he owed his eminence to the flatness of the surrounding country. It is no detraction from the qualities of the Very Rev. Inge to say that the enviroing country of his Church has much of the predominant character of the Russian steppes. Be that as it may, apart from the Dean's intellectual equipment, he had at his disposal for many years (and still apparently has) two whole columns in the *Evening Standard*. This ably-conducted journal, distinguished particularly for its hospitality to David Low, has a wide circulation, and its space is naturally of great value. So much so that it was often said of the "Gloomy Dean" that if he were not exactly a pillar of the Church he was at least two columns in the *Evening Standard*. Two columns in the *Freethinker* is a much greater honour, for it is read by the *élite* of intellectual Britain, but I fear we cannot compare with our near neighbour, the Shoe Lane journal, in our appeal to the nobility and gentry. These two valuable columns were and, apparently, still are at the Dean's disposal, to say his say on many things. If, incidentally, they should be used to show a reciprocal appreciation of those who appreciated his Church, why so much the better for the appreciator. And there is more joy in heaven, and the Church, over the kind words about it of an Intellectual than over the praises of dozens of pious ignoramuses.

For some years, therefore, the discerning reader has been entertained by a reciprocal back-scratching between Dean and Drama. As between Two Columns and Preface, deep has called to deep. It is of interest, therefore, to examine the mental state of this "brain" of the Church, specially picked by the brain of the Drama. To do so let us examine his most recent Two Column article, that appearing on the December day on which this is being written. It is on the topical subject of Crime and Punishment. This article has been called forth by the legislation, much overdue, proposed by the Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare. Being an ex-jailbird myself, I have been interested in Sir Samuel's proposals, which I think most students of penology will regard as being in the main on the right lines, that is, in accordance with the discoveries of science, especially the science of psychology. As the Bill before the House has been introduced by a Conservative Home Secretary, there is a fair chance that some at least of its provisions will become law. The question is, How many? The answer to that will be found, I imagine, chiefly in the sort of a reception the Bill is given in the Upper House. On the red benches of the House of Lords sit a couple of dozen Bishops of the Church of England, headed by their Graces, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. Anyone with only a smattering of the history of British penal legislation will know what an unenviable reputation the Bench of Bishops have gained in this connexion. A great deal, therefore, depends upon the episcopal bench as to how much of Sir Samuel's Bill will reach the Statute Book. Much also will depend upon how far the numerous lawyers among

their lordships stand up to the Bishops. I am not too hopeful of this.

Knowing something of this history I have turned with interest to the article referred to to see what the gloomy one had to say. After all, the matter of crime and sin is one in which the Church has always claimed to be specially concerned, forgiveness of sins being one of its specialities, for which it claims almost a monopoly. It is true that Christ is reported to have said that I should forgive my brother, even seventy-seven times, but that is a sort of off-licence forgiveness compared with the more formal absolution of the Church. I expected something quite categorical in the comments of this learned cleric on a subject so peculiar to the Church as sin and its correction. I knew, of course, that on other important social subjects, this product of Eton can always be counted upon to play for his side, the side of wealth and privilege, the side that regards, and calls, most reformers "Bolsheviks." But here is a non-class matter, a humanitarian subject. How would this paragon of Mr. Shaw's react to this subject, on which G.B.S. has had such a long and honourable record?

Well, believe it or not, the Dean shirks the subject. He begins by quoting a high-court judge now retired from the Bench. This judge's opinions were, although the Dean does not say so, published in the *Times*. A very safe gambit! Dr. Inge says that there is no higher authority on the aims of punishment than his ex-judge. He quotes, apparently with approval, the judge's opinion that there is "a real danger of making prison too comfortable," and he tells us that on such questions we must listen to those, such as the judge it would seem, who have experience in administering the law. In other words, the Church passes the buck to the Bench, while Psychology and Medicine are nowhere.

The two most thorny subjects in connexion with penal reform are capital punishment and corporal punishment. In ordinary English, hanging and flogging. Here the Dean notes with disapproval that public opinion (whatever that is) is ready to inflict "the maximum of moral cruelty"—by which he means imprisonment—"while it shrinks from even the minimum of physical cruelty," meaning hanging and flogging. He thinks it "quite right to break the neck of a murderer," but he draws the line at "strangling him in the old way." "What," he asks, "is five minutes of suffering [i.e., hanging] compared with the prolonged misery to the victim of a sensational murder trial?" Well, suppose he asks the latest unfortunate wretch at the Old Bailey what he prefers. This lack of imagination prepares us for the Dean's statement that he cannot understand why capital punishment is objected to. Obviously!

Not only does the Dean specifically say that he is not in favour of abolishing hanging, which he calls "weeding the garden," but he is in favour of extending the list of crimes to which hanging should be applied. He reminds us that "the legislation of the Hebrews" imposes the death-penalty for adultery and Sabbath-breaking. The Dean would apply the law of high treason (which has a nasty form of death-penalty) to "political strikes, like that of 1926." M. Daladier should surely feel strengthened in his struggle with the French working people by the Dean's support. But extending the death-penalty will presumably require an increase in the number of public executioners, which may mean an increase in the Home Office vote. To avoid this, apparently, the Dean is in favour of encouraging the condemned man to carry out the sentence on himself. But as later in his article he says that "moral indignation was given us to be used," would not this suggestion be cheating the community of this exercise?

From the foregoing we are prepared for the Dean's disapproval of "the same exaggerated sensibility" of those who would abolish corporal punishment. He fears this agitation will succeed. As becomes an old Etonian he believes in "stripes," for has not his old school a "flogging-block" besides an old school-tie? But they only use a birch at Eton, whereas the Dean points out that habitual criminals dislike the birch more than the cat. Etonians are, of course, not habitual criminals, but perhaps the present headmaster will give the matter his consideration. Maybe he could compromise on the rubber-truncheon.

Now, I hope and believe, I have not misrepresented nor misreported the Dean, and I would not like it to be imagined that this gentleman is entirely without some human compassion and enlightened ideas on this subject. Thus, he states, "suicide is not a crime." But the State so regards it, and if the criminal is to hang himself, as the Dean suggests, the law must be altered here.

It is a waste of words directing the attention of the Christian to the reported words of Christ, or one might remind the Dean and his fellow clerics of such texts as "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay," and "Judge not, that ye be not judged." But I suggest that Mr. Bernard Shaw, one of the heroes of my youth (especially for his humanitarian efforts), might let us know in the *Freethinker* or *Evening Standard*, just what he thinks of his paragon's latest lucubrations. I am sure the Editor of this journal would let him have his Two Columns.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

Acid Drops

A few weeks ago we suggested that the only peaceful way that is likely to have any effect on the Gangster Government of Germany is to create a moral boycott on the part of both Government and the peoples of the non-Fascist countries. Germany should be treated with exactly the civility that we treat bad characters in social life, and with a firm determination neither to make empty professions of confidence or of friendship. If non-naturalized Germans here and in other countries were met in this way, and if Governments will develop enough common honesty to follow the same policy, there would be a quicker change in the world than can be accomplished by false professions of friendship and a frantic eagerness to increase armaments to a point which makes war inevitable.

An illustration of the truth of what was then said has just been given by the German Government. Alarmed by the world-reaction against the bestial brutality of the treatment of the Jews and others, extending to the ill-treatment of children, a statement has just been issued that certain regulations have been relaxed, and an explanation sent to the press that the regulations against Jews was for their own self-protection. The wholesale robbery of Jews, the burning of Jewish buildings, the ill-treatment of women and children, the impudent demand that Jews, in and out of Germany, shall pay to the German Government £83,000,000 as compensation for the damage done by Germans under its instruction, were all for the benefit of the Jews. Well, Mr. Chamberlain may believe this, so may Lord Londonderry, and a few others, but we are certain that not many intelligent folk will.

The Vicar of Withycombe Raleigh, is a very thankful sort of a person, for we see he has just announced that he will sit in the three churches in his parish on a specified day to receive thank-offerings for "God's mercies, particularly in the preservation of peace in Europe." We think this matter wants straightening out. Have we to thank God for the "peace" that Munich gave us, or are we to thank Mr. Chamberlain, or Hitler, who has no

desire to have a war with England so long as Mr. Chamberlain is agreeable to his taking what he wants? We ought to know whom we have to thank, and if any credit is due to God, one may be excused for suggesting that he might have made a much better job of it. For at the moment, unless the rest of Europe is content to be blackmailed right and left, it looks as though the "peace" has only made war more certain, and has placed the Italian and German Gangsters in a stronger position than they have hitherto occupied. Or has Mr. Chamberlain and God entered into some sort of an arrangement that will ensure peace, *justice, decency of dealing and an exhibition of humanity* that is at present lacking in the two men in whom the Prime Minister has expressed such confidence? We have resorted to italics because there is such a thing as a peace that may be more horrible and more degrading than the most frightful war.

In the *Evening Standard*, ex-Dean Inge says that if Hitler has received royalties on the sale of *Mein Kampf*, he must be a wealthy man. Hitler has not received, at least he is said not to have received, the royalties accruing from his book. But why should he? He can take all he wishes for and for all he wants. As for his followers, they have always the Jews to rob. Which makes one wonder what will happen when the Jews have been completely despoiled. After all, gangsterism, like other things, becomes a habit, and after they have finished robbing Jews they may turn to robbing each other until a disgusted people wipe both out—as in Chicago.

A leading American journalist, Mr. David Hulbert, said that when he was in Germany he was told that the organization of the country was such that there was no unemployment. He was also told that everyone was contributing to the winter relief fund. But says Mr. Hulbert, "what I want to know and what no one in Berlin would tell me is, if there are no unemployed, who is in need of relief?" Naturally, but in a slave State whether everyone has enough to eat or enough clothing to wear depends upon the slave-owners.

Government interference with "news" is developing. Two "news-films" have suffered in this way. One was concerned with the Indian Mutiny. The other had to do with pictures of scenes in Italy. Interference in the last case was on the ground that its appearance might interfere with Mr. Chamberlain's policy of "appeasing" Mussolini. France, we see, is also a little nervous on this matter. There are still things to give away, and Mussolini's demands, like Hitler's, grow with every fresh "appeasement." Meanwhile we beg to call attention to the degree with which Czechoslovakia has dropped out of the "News." Nothing whatever appears to be going on there—at least nothing that is worth knowing. But we marvel at the unanimity of the press in their silence. The fate of the Czech is not "news." We fancy the Government agrees with this.

The *Keighley News* (Yorks) reports that considerable interest has been roused by the existence of a photograph taken during the Chamberlain "crisis" of a vision of Jesus Christ seen in the clouds. Nothing was heard in the shape of a hand holding a portrait of Mr. Chamberlain and crying "This is one in whom I am well pleased," there was just the head of Jesus shown on the clouds. The picture is, we understand, now being sold as a supernatural vision.

But, alas, and alas, according to the paper cited, there has now turned up a cutting from a paper published some years ago, which contains a picture identical with the "Crisis" one, taken at a "Mother's Meeting" outing some seven years ago. The picture was published as an illustration of tricks that an accidental arrangement of light and shade will play. There was no doubt, apparently, of the origin and nature of the first photograph, nor of its identity with the second one of the "crisis" period. The account will be found in the *Keighley News* for November 26. It is too bad to blow holes in "psychic" visions in this way.

The *Daily Mirror* has managed to get a copy of an alleged document sent by the Nazi Government to all teachers in Austria, and it confirms the determined attempt on the part of the Nazis to destroy the power of the Catholic Church. Some of the points it contains are:—

Christianity is a religion for slaves and fools.

The New Testament is a Jewish swindle on the part of the four Evangelists.

The Ten Commandments are the codification of the lowest instincts of mankind.

The Papacy is a swindle.

The Popes were always the worst possible persons, e.g., Alexander VI.

Of course, the Nazis are not denouncing Christianity in this way because of any love for Free thought. The attack is made because Christianity is supposed to be "international," and the only national creed allowed by the Hitler gang is Nazism. Any rival creeds must be thoroughly crushed, and Catholics are now in the happy position of being where the Jews were when Roman Catholicism was the top dog. They do not like it.

The Nazis naturally take care specially to attack the Jews and Judaism in their onslaught on Christianity. For example:—

Christianity is merely a cloak for Judaism.

Christianity is a substitute for Judaism made by Jews with headquarters in Rome.

Christ (the Jew) went whining on the Cross while Planetta the Nazi (and the murderer of Dollfuss) died shouting "Heil Hitler, long live Germany."

And so on. The *Universe*, the Catholic newspaper, has to admit that not even in Bolshevik Russia has there been such a highly organized attack on the Church. The Roman Catholic Church now knows what persecution, the persecution it incessantly waged against "heresy," feels like when directed against itself. And whether this document is fraud or not it is in perfect alignment with Nazi practice and policy, and quite as significantly, is in line with the kind of statements which the Roman Church issued and still issues against its enemies.

The Archbishop of York has managed to raise, during the past few years, £90,000 for churches in new building areas. In Sheffield, the Cathedral Enlargement Scheme seems to have cost £40,000, and another £20,000 is required. The money will, of course, come pouring in. But what a tragic farce this is, building churches for a population which is admittedly becoming less religious, while there are millions of people in a desperate situation all over Europe crying out for help.

A smart bit of jesuitism on the part of the vicar of St. Paul's, Kingston Hill (London), added £1 to the usual morning collection of £5. The Rev. A. Wellesley Orr announced that the last three verses of the accompanying hymn would be omitted "the last verse being bad poetry, and the other two an interpolation from the public school song book of the pawnbrokers' college." Here is one of the verses:—

Whatever, Lord, we lend to Thee,
Repaid a thousandfold will be,
Then gladly will we give to Thee
Who givest all.

"It will serve its purpose," said Mr. Orr, "if you realize that because people give in this spirit . . . our collections are not all they should be." We advise Mr. Orr to have a care lest the congregation object to being likened to a "pawnbrokers' college," and seek another parson who will maintain that the Lord *does* redeem his pledges "a thousandfold."

Brigadier-General Stephen Lushington's retirement from the chairmanship of Aldershot magistrates will be welcomed by those who prefer justice to be administered without extraneous considerations. This gentleman had a strong bias against hatless women, and once disallowed a girl witness's expenses on that account, saying: "It is

an insult to the court and a disreputable proceeding . . . you must appear properly dressed, and in a respectable manner." To a hatless woman witness being sworn, he said: "You are invoking God's name. . . . Do you consider that you have invoked it with due respect to God without a hat?"—Now, God being, like the apostle, "all things to all men," would be gentleman enough to allow the lady to retain her hat and count it his duty to doff his had he worn one. If the Brigadier ever had to address a private soldier who, as an Atheist, refused to take the oath, we should probably have experienced a very diverting record of similar wisdom, no doubt.

English Roman Catholics have offered a solemn prayer to the "holy mother of God," to plead with her "divine son" "on behalf of our poor suffering brethren in the German Reich, that they may be delivered from bondage." Perhaps some Roman Catholic authority will explain how it is that the "divine son" does not know all about it, why he did not do something if he could do anything, and what are we to think of him if (a) he does not know what is going on among his faithful followers, and (b) if he did not know and waited for his mother to persuade him what he ought to have done whether his mother wished him to do so or not?" These be very serious questions, and it must be remembered that he was not, while on earth, so docile to his mother, for on one occasion when his mother came after him and said that she had sought him with great sorrow, he replied in anything but a respectful manner. We hope some Christian authority will throw some light on the subject.

Cardinal Hinsley, whose reputation for economizing truth, and zeal in propagating lies, was well-shown during the months preceding the holding of the Conference of the World Union of Freethinkers recently, showed that his energy for perpetuating falsehoods has not withered. But even he might have ventured on a more likely lie than to assure a meeting of the Catholic book fair that the statement that "Catholics in their reading were cribbed and confined," is quite wrong. Will some of Cardinal Hinsley's friends enquire what a priest would say to any of his flock who, say, read this journal weekly, or make a habit of reading Freethought publications, or even make a habit of encouraging their children to read non-Roman Catholic books, or attend meetings at which Roman Catholic teaching is strongly criticized? Everyone knows what would happen to Roman Catholics who behave in this way. But one lie more or less is evidently not likely to trouble the conscience of Hinsley.

The Rev. J. W. Wilkinson, who happens to be Mayor of Erith, has refused to have a street in that town named after him. This is not due to modesty, but because he doesn't like the name. He says it "savours too much of a butler or other family servant." In other words, it is pure snobbery. Theoretically he believes we are all brethren, but he dislikes being mixed up with butlers and other kinds of servants. Now if he had only had some of the names that appear in Burke, the owner of which is fortunate enough to have had an ancestress who played the part of prostitute to a king, that would have been quite another thing, for these were not quite so common as servants. But what will happen if Mr. Wilkinson, when he gets to heaven finds himself wing to wing, with some glorified butler? Above all, suppose when he is introduced to Jesus Christ, he suddenly remembers that Jesus was, after all, only the son of a carpenter—even if we overlook the dubious character of his male parentage? We suggest that Mr. Wilkinson makes the best he can of his name, pleading meanwhile, that like his mentality, it is a natural misfortune.

Why does any woman marry any man? Why does any man marry any woman? If that question were asked in any newspaper there would be thousands of replies, and very few would be honest enough to say they did not know. They just did it. And now a Roman Catholic priest, as reported in the *Reporter*, a

Yorkshire paper, is asking the same question in another form. He asks, "Why do Protestant young men continue to pay attention to Catholic girls?" The priest is not really concerned with the happiness of the Protestant boy and the Catholic girl, only that he sees a loss of custom, since it is likely that the Protestant influence may be too strong for the priest. And left alone there is no reason why the Protestant married to the Catholic should not get on quite happily, with their opposite beliefs toning down whatever bigotry exists on either side. But that would not suit the priest. He wants the bigotry to continue as strongly as ever, with himself, or some other priest in control. It is not, in short, the happiness of the newly-married couple that concerns the priest, but the desire to use the union of the two as a source of supply for his own business. We have no hesitation in saying that, left alone, a Protestant marrying a Catholic would give much the same result as any other marriage. Some would wish they had married earlier, others would wish they had never married at all. If there is a greater proportion of the latter in these mixed marriages the fault lies entirely with the priest.

Mr. W. C. Lockwood, a well-known journalist, addressed the Norbury Brotherhood, last week, on "Why God Allows Punishment and Suffering." It is a question all Theists should ask. It is a question impossible for Theists to answer. According to the report in the *Sireatham News*, Mr. Lockwood's only attempt to furnish an explanation was that "God allows it because it is merited." Even Moses was not quite so crude as that. He at least led us to believe that God punished the descendants of those who "merited" punishment to be punished "unto the third and fourth generation." It is simply silly to lie about the sufferings of babies being "allowed because they are merited." Lowell exaggerated no doubt, but he was far nearer the facts in referring to "History's pages" recording:—

"Truth for ever on the scaffold,
Wrong for ever on the throne."

A new book by Dr. James Parkes: *Jesus, Paul and the Jews*, discusses the question of whether the New Testament, in its attacks on the Pharisees—which was a favourite diversion of Christ, according to his biographers—has not been the inspiring influence in anti-Semitism throughout the ages. Dr. Parkes says plainly:—

If it be true that the picture of Judaism, which (with the Gospels and Epistles for basis) has been consistently given since the second century, is in reality unjust to the Jews, then the reparation which the Christian Church owes to Judaism is one so terrible that it is not possible to calculate it. For from this conception springs the whole growth of anti-Semitism, and the age-long tragedy of the Jewish people.

The Methodists were "directed" by their "Conference" to observe "Temperance Sunday" in every connexional church. The date has passed, and it is reported that no fewer than a hundred-and-seventy-six churches ignored the whole business. Out of forty circuits only eight took any notice of headquarters' instructions in this once-important "movement." It is possible that even Methodists are beginning to "mind their own business."

Czecho Freethinkers' Relief Fund

Previously acknowledged, £170 7s. 10d.; H. Black, 10s.; E. A. McDonald, £1 1s.; M. Baker, £1; "Conscience Money," Nottingham, 7s. 6d.; E. H. Hassell, 7s.; Mrs. C. Cohen, £1 1s.; Dr. R. C. Cohen, £1 1s.; F. Warburton, £1; W. Cooper, 10s.; Peter Cotes, 10s. Total £186 15s. 4d.

This Fund is now closed.

We shall be obliged, if there is any inaccuracy in the above list, or if any subscription is not acknowledged; if those concerned will write at once.

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

To Advertising and Distributing the *Freethinker*.—E. P. Rautela, rs, 3d.

W. W. SMITH.—Thanks for interesting letter. We shall look forward to meeting you at one of our meetings in the future.

J. MORRIS.—We all have to do what we can, and we are pleased to know that you are doing your share to help on the Cause.

J. B. LYONS.—Pleased to have your appreciation of Mr. Palmer's articles. We wish we had a larger paper than we have at present. We could then do much more.

ATHOS ZENOO.—Pleased to hear from you and to know that you are still keeping busy in the right direction. The season's greetings.

H. BAMFORTH.—Thanks for address of a likely new reader; paper being sent for four weeks.

S. WARD.—Pleased the matter has had so satisfactory an ending. Hope there will be no recurrence of the unpleasantness.

S. GORDON HOGG.—Sorry we have not space for your letter this week. It will appear in our next issue. But we do not see that what was said by Mr. Cutner regarding G. J. Holyoake runs counter to a recognition of Holyoake's work as a propagandist. The aspect of Holyoake's temperament touched on has been noted by many critics, who were ready enough to pay tribute to his work in the Freethought movement.

C. HARPUR.—Next week.

MR. H. BLACK writes: "Thanks for this week's short essay in autobiography. I could do with some more." But we have no great taste for writing an autobiography. We should like to be judged by what we have done, and that is available for all who care to seek information. The last forty volumes of the *Freethinker* with a collection of what we have written otherwise should provide enough information.

A. WILSON.—See "Sugar Plums."

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

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

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.

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

The "Freethinker" is supplied to the trade on sale or return. Any difficulty in securing copies should be at once reported to this office.

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

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.

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

LOCAL FAVOURITE

Some children from the lower East Side of New York, on their first visit to the country, were watching a terrible hailstorm, and one small girl expressed her disapproval: "God's getting awful fresh, throwing down those big stones! First thing He knows, He'll hit somebody."

"You mustn't talk like that about God!" exclaimed a little comrade, poking her vigorously, "Most everybody on our block likes Him."—Lillian D. Wald, Head of the Henry Street Settlement, quoted by W. Orton Tewson.

Sugar Plums

Will all concerned please note that owing to the prolongation of the Christmas holiday, notices and other items intended for the issue of the *Freethinker* dated January 1, must reach this office not later than the first post of December 22.

For those who are looking for a season's greeting a little out of the usual to send to friends, and, if not for that reason then for others that we consider sufficient, we strongly commend a *Fanfare for Freethought*, by Bayard Simmons, which has just been issued by the Secular Society, Limited. Mr. Simmons' quality as a maker of verse is well known to *Freethinker* readers, and many of the poems included in this small volume have already appeared in these pages. There is a distinct "hit" in every poem, and sense and sensibility run well in harness. There is strength without aggressiveness, and the reader need not be a militant Freethinker to appreciate the point that is made, and even to appreciate its cogency. The booklet is neatly bound, well printed, and is published at one shilling, by post rs. 2d. There should be a brisk demand for the work over Christmas and the New Year.

On Saturday, December 17, a debate will take place at the City Literary Institute Debating Society, Guildhouse Street, Gillingham Street, Victoria, S.W.1, between Mr. Colin Evans (Medium) and Mr. R. H. Rosetti, on "The Case for Spiritualism" (That survival and communication are proved). The debate commences at 7.30 p.m., and visitors are cordially invited. We understand that admission is free.

The *Rationalist Press Annual* for 1939 is as usual full of interesting matter, and is the better for suggesting in more than one instance differences of opinion. There is an excellent article by C. E. Joad, who writes on the benefits of a useless education. Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell writes on the Church in Spain, in which he supplies some useful first-hand information on the neglect, even the suppression, of education by the Church and the Royalist Government, and the extent to which the Republican Government has developed its schools, even in the midst of war. Mr. J. Rowland gives us an article on "The Scientist and the Church," pointing to the need of compelling scientists to recognize that science and religion are as poles apart, although we think it is more a question of securing a public to which the scientist may express his real opinions without fear. Mr. Gowan Whyte writes well "Among the Mystics." The opening article is by Sir Arthur Keith, on "A History of Some of the Heresies," although none of these appears to have been of a very terrible character. His article concludes with some very confused comments on the question of "Race," but as he does not say clearly what he means by that term, it will have the effect of leaving the confused still in their confusion, and the more wide-awake will be left—just wondering. Anyway the *R.P.A. Annual* offers an exceedingly good shillingsworth, and may well occupy a place in a Christmas parcel of reading.

Mr. Beverley Nichols, writing in the *Sunday Chronicle* thinks it "a pity that the Atheists are never offered the hospitality of Broadcasting House." He also suggests that Mr. Cohen be asked to broadcast. Mr. Nichols is quite safe in making the suggestion. The invitation is not likely to be offered, and if it were offered under the usual conditions it would not be accepted. Mr. Cohen has said too much against the evils of censorship to submit to it at the hands of the B.B.C. And that institution has shown throughout its career, that it will admit no straightforward criticism of the Christian religion, although it does not object to pretending fairness by occasionally inviting a criticism of religious beliefs, so long as the person selected is "safe" enough to be trusted not to offer to say anything to which a liberal-minded person would object.

But Mr. Nichols frames his suggestion rather curiously. He says, after suggesting that Freethought ought to be heard "on the air," "Mr. Cohen constantly abuses me in his columns. Well, let him abuse me over the air." We are not aware of ever abusing Mr. Nichols, although we have occasionally referred to the emptiness and triviality of the newspaper chatter of these "feature" writers in the ordinary press. When Mr. Nichols' remarks have been empty, and when they have called for attention, we have spoken, as we always speak, plainly. And when he has written, as he has done, downright nonsense about the high qualities of Nazi Germany, or some stereotyped nonsense about anti-Christians or Jews, we have treated such comments as they deserved. We never write to please, nor do we write to gratuitously give offence. Our object in writing is a very serious one, and if what we say appears at times to be jocular, well, as we have so often said, we are never so serious as when we are humorous. The misfortune of many is that they are never so humorous as when they are trying to be serious.

We are asked to announce that the celebrated Czechoslovakian dancer, Mira Slavonica, has just arrived in London on her way to the United States. This artist, who has scored a great success on the Continent, especially in France and in Spain, has agreed to give a performance in London, the proceeds of which will be devoted to the care of Czechoslovakian refugees, particularly little children. Thus London will have an opportunity of seeing not only Czechoslovak folk dances, but also an interpretation of current ideas through the medium of dancing. Tickets 10s. 6d., 7s. 6d., 5s. 9d., and 3s. 6d., may be obtained from the Box Office, Rudolf Steiner Hall, N.W.1.

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. are expecting another full house this evening (December 18), in the Bristol Street School, when Mr. G. Bedborough will lecture on "Godlessness." The improved seating and lighting of the lecture-room ensures comfort, and Mr. Bedborough may be relied upon to give an interesting address. The lecture begins at 7 o'clock.

The Forty-Second Annual Dinner, under the auspices of the N.S.S. will take place in the Waldorf Hotel, Aldwych, London, W.C.2, on Saturday evening, January 28, 1939. Tickets will be had from the Pioneer Press or offices of the National Secular Society, 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, 8s. 6d. each (including service). Those requiring a Vegetarian Menu should state this when applying for tickets. The Annual Dinner provides the occasion for Freethinkers from all parts of England to meet and spend a really happy evening together.

Mr. E. A. McDonald sends from South Africa a contribution to our Czech Freethinkers Relief Fund, and writes:—

I have much pleasure in enclosing Postal Note for 21s. as a contribution towards the Czech Freethinkers' Relief Fund. I am afraid that I can see little cause for optimism in the immediate future, but we must, in self-respect, take hands together to ease the burden of those whose fate, if the political miscreants continue to have their way, will surely be ours to-morrow. In the darkened passage through which bewildered mankind is stumbling, there is no time for divided counsels among those who cherish the liberty our plucky forebears fought for and won. It will be enough if we can keep the light burning in the storm of unreason which is sweeping the world, and if we go down we must let it be with colours flying, an inspiration for the men of a kinder age in the future.

I am to set forth the law of my own mind; which let the man who shall have approved it, abide by, and let him to whom it shall appear not reasonable, reject it.

Petrarch.

A Life's Last Phase

(Concluded from page 790)

HAD he been able to isolate himself from all temptation (as he had been isolated in Reading Gaol) and go on writing, he might have given the world great masterpieces.

Nothing except *The Ballad* can, however, be shown for the two years of "freedom" (God save the sorry word!) that lay between Autumn, 1897, and November 30, 1900. Compelled by his mother to leave Oscar in solitude, after their love-solstice in Naples together, else to lose his allowance, Lord Alfred Douglas, now nearing thirty years old, laboured alone at his literary lore, in London. Equally alone, in the spiritual sense, Wilde stayed on in France.

Bitter years!

Even in Paris, that city of Light and Enlightenment, Oscar had to mind his P's and Q's (the latter letter had been the cause of his downfall!)

Boys who had been at school when the scandal occurred, and were now in their 'teens, were watched by their anxious parents lest they should show signs of the virus of homo-sexuality.

Paul Morand, one of France's intellectuals and a man of fine literary technique, tells this story.

He was taken by his father on a visit to London. Although Wilde was now dead and buried, the middle-class father, with all the trepidations of his own mediocrity and his wife's Roman Catholicism, deemed London to be the hot-bed of vice . . . even as provincial Britishers (heaven bless their innocence!) think that everybody in Paris must be either a pimp or a prostitute.

"Take great care, Paul," murmured Morand *père* to his son, "If you go for a walk alone, while I am busy with my London friends, avoid the Parks. If any man with a sunflower in his coat, and carrying a lily in his hand should speak to you, don't answer him. *Run for your life!* Run; and put yourself in the care of a policeman—or get back to the hotel by the open thoroughfares with all possible speed!"

Master Paul listened goggle-eyed. Even to-day, nearly forty years after the incidents described, Monsieur Morand, great lover of the picturesque, sighs as he relates: "Never a sign of sunflower or lily, alas! met my eager gaze!" London was very unromantic!

I know, from what was related to me during my Parisian visit, in the year before Oscar's death, that Englishmen in the French capital (many of them being correspondents of the English and American newspapers) went out of their way to defame Oscar.

Arnold Bennett was there that summer. He spoke very bitterly of Wilde's tolerated presence in the capital. Oscar, in reply, said no word: but how he must have groaned in spirit! There was that frightful episode of the barber's shop. . . . The story was told to me by Jean Joseph-Renaud, who had it at first-hand from an eye-witness.

Oscar had just risen, after being shaved and massaged. He was leisurely wiping his face. The one who should have followed him into the chair, and who now recognized him as he turned round, started backward with a snarl.

He was an Englishman, and belonged to the ranks of journalism.

"Sit in *that* chair?" he cried fiercely.

"Never! it ought to be burned!"

If the fallen giant of literature reeled as he left the shop, who can wonder! Was ever so gross an insult before offered to a gentleman of culture and breeding? It seemed even worse than when he was spat upon at

the railway station during his transfer from one prison to another.

I know that Oscar had his brief periods of prosperity—and his longer period of penury. In fact, 1899 and 1900 were one continual see-saw of Fortune; and no wonder he became wilfully extravagant, and quite reckless. "Look what he spends on drink and food alone!" his critics would cry. "He gives the most extraordinary tips; and he never walks, even from one side of the street to the other! Sometimes he keeps a cab waiting outside his restaurant for half-a-dozen hours. How *can* anybody say he is badly off?"

If Wilde grew indifferent also about his appearance, it was not from a love of being slovenly. Temperament has a lot to do with a man's care about dress. As Oscar drank more he became equally more indifferent what impression he might make on men (and women).

Especially was he unconcerned, as they so deliberately went out of their way to affront his dignity!

To the deuce with everybody!

I have it on the authority of both Sherrard, O'Sullivan, and his landlord, Dupoirier, that he never complained about his health, or apologized about his habits.

He must be taken for what he was—that was his attitude. It was a reasonable attitude. To the end, he maintained a haughty spirit of individualism.

Who can grudge him this slow method of suicide?—for life had nothing further to offer him, and he felt that Society could never forgive or forget.

Swiftly and insidiously, habits of delection grew and grew upon him as the weeks crawled by. Weeks of watching and waiting—for *Death*!

Let me protest then that his philosophy, altruistic throughout, even more than quixotically "Christian," had found expression long before those last fatal two years. If Bacchus and Venus, Dionysus and Aphrodite, were now the only pagan deities his soul could recognize, that phase was more his material misfortune than the predilection of his clean intellect or his noble spirit.

It was of the Wilde of 20 to 40—the Oscar of 1874 to 1894—we could best claim *erat demonstrandum*!

Another aspect of even his poverty—the transient periods to which I have referred—I must mention. He never went out of his way to seek co-partners in vice. Strange as it may appear, in view of his deteriorating physical and mental charms, it was *he* who acted as flame to innumerable moths. He was the tempted, not the tempter, in those hectic months.

In Paris, "Bosie" kept a small flat in the Avenue Kleber. The friends met frequently; and Lord Alfred never failed to present Oscar with a substantial gift. But they bickered a lot—and generally over money. There were times when Oscar became sullen and savage, as he saw before him the young man, born with a silver spoon in his mouth, with a great future (as he believed) before him—while he, a much greater intellect, was condemned by Fate to a swift self-slaughter!

Oscar lived in a very real hell!

Only once that year I saw them together, while I sat at an adjacent table with Marcel Schwob. We had left them to themselves, for they were having heated words. I called my companion's attention how, even inside the space of a few days, Oscar had become puffer in the face. I indicated that his eyes were more inflamed. Perhaps it was his anger—but that morning they appeared peculiarly suggestive of a possible epilepsy. I found myself wondering if apoplexy might not seize him suddenly in one of these fits of tempers.

After "Bosie" had left (we saw at parting the exchange of a handful of notes) Oscar joined us. He soon became more like his sunny self. It is the advantage of Youth that it can anticipate Maturity, whereas Maturity can only remember . . . and regret.

Oscar's conversation soon flagged, no matter how he tried, it became tinged with sadness.

I thought of that ancient Islamic prayer: "O God, make not man endure *all* that he can bear!"

Quite clearly to sympathetic eyes Oscar's cross was now at its heaviest, and he would not be sorry to meet the final ordeal. That poignant memory was in my mind when, many years later, I wrote the penultimate stanzas of one of my best poems:—

. . . No thorny wreath we bear
Need bring despairing frown:
Our Cross we bear as long as we can bear,
Past that . . . we lay it down!

His "dying words" are on record as "I seem to be dying beyond my means!" That was a flier at the doctor's doubts, in a whispered colloquy with hotel-proprietor Dupoirier, whether his many "bills" would be met. The "dying words" of the world's Great, remember, are often uttered many hours before dissolution. For it is rare indeed that man or woman slips into the Silence with a sighing breath, having been fully conscious a few moments before.

Nay, in the case of Oscar the period of waiting was tragically long.

This is what happened:—

"November 30, 1900. About five-thirty in the morning a complete change came over him. The lines of the face altered, and I believe what is called the death-rattle began. I had never heard anything like it before: it sounded like the horrible turning of a crank, and it never ceased until the end. His eyes did not respond to the light-test any longer. Foam and blood came continually from his mouth.

"From one o'clock we did not leave the room, and the painful noise from the throat became louder and louder. We destroyed letters to keep ourselves from breaking down. The two nurses were out, and the proprietor of the hotel had come up to take their place. At one-forty-five (afternoon) the time of his breathing altered. . . . I went to the bedside and held his hand. His pulse began to flutter. He heaved a deep sigh, the only natural one I had heard since I arrived. The limbs seemed to stretch involuntarily, the breathing became fainter. He passed at ten minutes to two exactly . . ."

Robert Ross is that eye-witness.

Frank Harris was not there.

My protest to G.B.S. is that Frank's book is full of misrepresentations; and have, therefore, joined my voice to Kernahan's and Sherrard's, that Shaw should greatly modify his pronouncements. But alas! I know G.B.S. sufficiently well to realize that he loves authority too much to retract. He enjoys too well at eighty-two, proving how sonorous his voice may be!

We who both love and admire him are regretful of his stubborn activity. Perhaps he will be more significant when *he*, also, speaks from the Silence—which, nonetheless, is not to wish his pen laid aside forever.

Meanwhile, by his enthusiasm for Frank Harris's pornographic picture of Oscar, he is doing his fellow-townsmen a grave injustice.

A graver injustice, maybe, than he suspects!

True, too true, that after he came out of Reading, had Oscar Wilde shared the puritanical self-denial of a George Bernard Shaw, his life could have re-started.

Had he never put pen to paper, he might have more than justified his existence! And he might have been

the living contemporary of G.B.S. to the hour in which I write these words.

He might then have been a second Socrates, with his disciples about him to chronicle his words—those golden words that could find

Under the common thing the hidden grace,
And conjure wonder out of emptiness,
Till mean things put on Beauty like a dress,
And all the world was an enchanted place!

The Might Have Been!

Rid of the burdens of a social whirl—a whirl which Reading had proven to him was dross and tinsel to the questing spirit—he might have philosophized like those “gods,” who

Lie beside their nectar, and the bolts are hurled
Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds are lightly curled

Round their golden houses, girdled with the gleaming world!

No longer, with such a guide and comforter in the forest of Sex and Morality, we who are even in the slightest degree “off the norm” need—we have found ourselves lost in the Jungle? *His* suffering, *his* remorse, *his* sacrifice would have carved for us so wide a path that we could henceforth walk freely! We could have borne ourselves as men and women, fearing nothing but the dark secrets of our own hidden hearts!

And their secrets would have been robbed of their rancour!

For we feel, every one of us, that violence against the world into which we live will lead us nowhere. We cannot destroy—and we are not able to escape.

The remedy is simple—to be sure of ourselves, as Oscar was sure of himself until Success spoiled him, and sent him grovelling with the swine.

We have to find that steadfastness of soul, passionate and eager and active, that will lead us to the utmost form of self-expression and self-realization!

That is the lesson of the Wilde tragedy—its one gift to History.

Oscar's written philosophy goes a long way toward helping us to that “purity of heart” of which Jesus spoke, and which we feel to be revealed in Oscar's epigram:—

“It is personalities, not principles, that move the world! Recognize no standard *outside your own temperament!*”

J. M. STUART-YOUNG.

Nigeria.

Being Peculiar

We once used to hear of the “Peculiar People.” They may still exist. The members of this sect believed that Jesus was both God, and the Son of God, and other things, and that he came to save sinners from the Pit. He also left excellent rules and aphorisms for the guidance of Mankind. To this extent they were not peculiar. In this they were aligned with Bishops and Archbishops, Nonconformist Divines and those not so divine, the Local Preachers. In this as well they agreed with that multitude of people whose beliefs are in a state of mush—those who think that Jesus gave us the Goods but the Churches (Bad 'cess to them!) have led us astray from the Gospel, pure and undefiled, which can be found in the pages of the New Testament.

Not in assenting to these platitudes the Peculiar People were far from peculiar. Their singularity lay in another direction. For whereas it was the habit of the bulk of Christian adherents to rhapsodize, with eyes upward and hands upon their bosoms, about the superlative qualities of the Christian ethic, accompanying this attitude was the disposition to put

this ethic upon such a lofty plane that it was excusable for the poor, ordinary Christian, bowed down as he was by the burden of his flesh, not to take any notice of it. The more they praised the Christian ethic, the nearer to the stars they could prove it to be, the more excuse there was for not putting Christianity “into practice.” So the specific teaching of Jesus got “loftier and loftier,” so lofty in fact that it became in time useful only as an elocutionary exercise in panegyric or—if the occasion called for it—for the confusion of infidels.

The Peculiar People were not, however, content to stay in that accommodating galley. They thought Christism had, in one respect, practical utility. Whereas the great majority of Christians were brimming over with soul qualities—having found the right formula by prayerfulness, and so “got right with God,”—the Peculiar Person went further and drew from the words of Jesus (or his father) pieces of instruction which they thought would be of great value to them on their earthly pilgrimage. Particularly did they fasten upon:—

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the Church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up. . . .

The advice, of course, has an esoteric meaning, and does not mean what it appears to mean. The Peculiar People should have gone to their pastors, who would have made a few erasures and amendments—and additions—as become equity draughtsmen. But they, the Peculiar ones, had fallen into the heresy—and so imperilled their immortal souls—that no man should come between them and their Maker. This was a dreadful heresy, and it is plain to see they deserved all they got both in this world and the next. For the Priest is not a Man; he has been oiled and embraced by other Priests in the Apostolic Succession, and has become, for all practical purposes, God.

But the Peculiar People went on their self-opinionated way; intellectual pride was their undoing, so they just called in the elders of the Church when they (or theirs) were sick—and did as God commanded. No doctors for them! The Lord did not, however, save the sick as promised; the much prayed-over and much besmeared person often went off to join the Trinity. Then the enthusiastic Christian who reached the high C in his endeavour to boost the ethics of Jesus said, “What a very Peculiar Person! We are afraid there is nothing left for us to do but to put him in gaol.” They knew that the Ethic of Christianity was just something to talk about; to put it in practice was absurd. It was Peculiar, and to be Peculiar deserved imprisonment.

You may talk with the tongues of Angels, but if you don't say the same things as the Shepherds command you to say, you are Peculiar. To be disobedient is to be Peculiar, and, true to the traditions of Jehovah, the Church want obedience, first and foremost, and all the time. You may say things that even sound sensible; you may even by study and reflection have hammered out a few sensible generalizations; but, if they are not of the approved pattern, you are Peculiar. You are an irritant to the Status Quo; you disturb the complacent (disturb them very profoundly), by not joining in their set choruses. You are *Peculiar*, and it becomes a main objective of the really religious majority to force upon that person's attention in all practical and disagreeable ways that it would have been better for him in this world had he never been born.

The Man who cries “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” in the places where Diana is highly appraised is considered to have attended to his first social duty. It does not matter a brass button whether the shouter

in his heart of hearts thinks well of Diana—he may, in fact, think she is a brazen hussy—the main thing is to *shout*. If he shouts lustily he is helping the cult; he knows the meaning of *noblesse oblige*; he knows the value of loyalty; he respects the rite of the “old School Tie.” This is sufficient to enable him to linger among those who have a say in the doling out of the glittering prizes. It is realized that he has at least had the gumption to play the game, and as a reward his hand will now and again be permitted to plunge into the bran-tub.

What is wanted is the conformist. The Atheist is Peculiar; the Communist is Peculiar; the Faith-curer is Peculiar. The believer in a Flat Earth is also Peculiar. Belief in a flat-earth does not indeed very violently disturb the existing order of society; but it is quite sufficient to prove him to be a goat rather than a sheep, and those who are not sheep may break out at any time into an eruption of a more significant type. The fluffy wool of the sheep is the only wear. It is not regarded with equanimity if at any time you have sufficient individuality to leave the kindly chorus. Accept everything that is as having come down from above with the approval of the Trinity. This may offend your intellect, but we will see to it not offending your pocket. Intellectual Pride is a terrible sin.

So play the game, you cads! Profess no ideas other than those which you have obtained by infection, and we will see to it that the profession will not drain your pocket or hinder your walk through life. Your reputation will also be safe, if that should weigh with you. The great Bishop Berkeley had a great mind, but he was, alas, soaked with the creed of his fathers. So he saw with clarity that the freethinking Anthony Collins “deserved to be denied the common benefit of air and water.” Now, that is the stuff to give the troops! Thousands to-day see in this recipe the only way to preserve the systems from which their honours spring. It is so easy to understand. We are alive and comfortable. Things are going along pretty well as far as we are concerned. But will this last if we are going to allow Peculiar People to live—and breathe and have their being. Of course they talk nonsense—wicked nonsense—but they are so plausible, and some of them do seem to be really excited about the Here and Now, and it imposes upon so many. There is only one satisfactory method: No Air, No Water, for the Peculiar People! What will we come to if in these revolutionary ideas of free thought and free speech men neglect the Sacrament, sneer at the Homilies, and want exotic explanations of holy doctrines? No Air, No Water! Hurrah! We must look up the texts that fit in with this for our next Sunday's discourse. What Did Jesus Say? Jesus was not, he it remembered, always a kid-gloved mentor. Peculiar in some things, no doubt, but not always, praise be to God! One of the blessings of the Gospels is that there is therein something for all times, and all places. And so the Word of God will endure for ever, and the Peculiar go down with ignominy as their portion.

T. H. ELSTOR.

ENGLISH IN ITALY

(Notice exhibited for the benefit of English visitors by the Brothers of the Misericordia, who are prepared to assist all sick or injured persons of any creed or class.)

THE MISERABLE BROTHERS
HARBOUR EVERY KIND OF DISEASE AND
HAVE NO REGARD FOR RELIGION

From Arthur Stanley's new Anthology of Travel, "The Golden Road."

Problem of Colouring in Animals

I LOOKED for some comments from some abler pen than mine on the article on this subject by Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner in your issue of November 27.

I doubt the statement that the experiments on the elimination equally of insects, whether apparently protected or not, is “amply confirmed.”

Artificially engineered experiments are incapable of reproducing except approximately a picture that depends for its setting on unlimited time and open conditions, only completely obtained in a natural state.

It seems to me that the evolutionary hypothesis demands that the existing form of creatures in colour as well as internal and external structure, is completely determined by natural selection, in which is, of course, included sexual selection.

Furthermore, any feature developed under conditions no longer operative, leads to an atrophy of this feature, and eventually to complete elimination, since any such vestigial remains, not functionally active seem always to be a disadvantage to their owners for a variety of reasons, such superfluities gradually bring about such a non success (failure) in their possessors, that the unmodified individual and his particular line of descent gradually disappear, together with the one-time desirable features.

With regard to the insects specially named by Mr. Bonner, it may be said that the success of the form of mature individual praying Mantis, depends not so much on disguise from enemies, but proves an advantage for securing food adequate for health and vigour, and any that depart too far from the parental form, fail to secure food enough to mature and reproduce a line of a materially different form, though this aspect of advantageous colouration is casually dismissed by the reference in the article in question to the fact that the mantis “preys on other insects foolish enough to come too near.”

The factors tending to prevent survival and reproductivity are very numerous, and this leads to competition, so that insects, as all forms of life, have evolved to produce enormous numbers of offspring and fair continuity occurs, even though only isolated units of the new generation are lucky enough in shape and circumstance to in turn reach reproductive maturity, each new individual represents a strain different to greater or lesser extent from its begetters, and if the difference is of some feature inimical to the chances of individual development, then that particular strain is eliminated at that time. It is important in assessing all the evolutionary influences to recognize that this process of destruction is present through all juvenile phases up to maturity, so that, if the forces acting on immature forms alter, then there arise a selective elimination at any stage which can be seen by the change in embryonic forms.

It is unthinkable to me that the complexity and specialized nature of the imitative form of each leaf and stick insect is of no immediate and direct advantage to its owner, and that without it, it would perish. It is well known how fine is the equilibrium that obtains, and how quickly each excess in succeeding generations is eliminated, some are not sufficiently well adapted to get their requirements of the available food supply, others are too easily found by their enemies since they have varied too far in features that make them just a wee bit more conspicuous, so that they or their similarly varied offspring are eventually disposed of.

With regard to the whiteness and blindness of cave dwelling forms, it can be seen that under such conditions what would otherwise be a lethal defect is no longer such, so a mutative sport with no chance of survival in daylight persists on an equality in darkness with those who still retain pigment forming or visual faculties. The eyes are no advantage, and if during all stages of growth those retaining such sensitive centres are more vulnerable to injury or danger during the growth processes, then the eliminating factors can and seemingly do tend under this subjection to perpetual darkness to operate against the individuals for whom the vestigial sight or pigment characters prove disadvantageous under the

altered conditions, allowing us to note a preponderance of the apparently imperfect forms.

The conditions in the deep of the oceans are very little known, it is no great effort of imagination to think that a phenomenon we note as phosphorescence may relate to and be a by product of some other stimulative force, say electrical excitation that serves in these black depths to act as a warning to enemies, a tool for food winning, or an advertisement to mates in whom organs sensitive to such impulses are developed, though blind in our meaning of the term. It is known that marine animals alone, of all living things, have developed organs to generate electric activity, and that electric phenomena only made manifest to our senses in the last few hundred years, have actually been an important factor in the life habits of the marine animals for a vast but immeasurable period.

My summing up is firstly to advise those who, like Mr. Bonner, tend to rely on isolated experiments for their knowledge, to give attention and due weight to the time factor and its effect on any particular line of descent, an imperfection not lethal in one generation may eventually bring about the obliteration of a whole line of animals with a similar disadvantageous feature.

Secondly, to regard evolutionary modifying influences as having effect, not only to the final adult form, but exerting a deathly pressure at all stages in the growth through which the individual passes, so that the evidence for phylogeny from recapitulatory observations is often much obscured, because of the drastic changes that are to be observed in the immature of successive generations, though the form of the adult is but little altered.

I have long preferred to think of evolution as the term to describe the effects of the elimination of those unfit, to a lethal extent, rather than that of the "survival of the fittest." Not much difference, I agree, but it is there, for in the one case we seem to set up a prophetic standard, an aim for the future, but if expressed my way we need only take note of those that perish at any stage, and from noting the effects get a clue to the causes for this cessation.

I conclude by reiterating that no experiment can reproduce, except approximately, results that depend in nature on an almost infinite number of complex forces acting on each individual, to which has to be added a time effect measured almost in terms of eternity, that together change all racial characters.

DON FISHER.

Correspondence

PROBLEMS OF ANIMAL COLOURING

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—The article on the above subject, by C. E. Bradlaugh-Bonner, in the *Freethinker* of November 27, 1938, was an eye-opener to me.

I heard Wallace lecture on this subject fifty years ago. He agreed with Darwin in making Natural Selection the sole cause of such phenomena.

Prof. Poulton, of Oxford University, has made these problems his special study for many years, and is a keen supporter of Natural Selection as the sole cause of Animal Colouring.

I would like to know when, where and by whom these recent experiments opposed to the findings of Darwin, Wallace, and Poulton took place.

The writer of the article inserts an extract from the writings of Professor Suenod, who puts forward an alternative theory of "Harmonic Frequency."

If C. E. Bradlaugh-Bonner would kindly explain what is meant by "harmonic frequency," I would be grateful.

HENRY SPENCE.

For I think all right use of life, and the one secret of life, is to pave ways for the firmer footings of those who succeed us.—*Meredith*.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON

OUTDOOR

KINGSTON BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Place) : 7.30, A Lecture. Weather permitting.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond) : 11.30, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury. Parliament Hill Fields, 3.30, Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park) : 3.30, Sunday, Messrs. Bryant, Barnes, Collins, Tuson and Mrs. N. Buxton.

INDOOR

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Alexandra Hotel, South Side, Clapham Common, S.W.4) : 7.30, Mr. R. Pugh, B.A. (R.A.C.S.)—"Co-operation."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) : 11.0, J. P. Gilmour—"Loyalties: True and False."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.) : 7.30, W. Platt—"The Dangers of Birth-Control."

COUNTRY

INDOOR

BIRKENHEAD (Wirral) BRANCH N.S.S. (Beechcroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane) : 7.0, C. Parkinson, M.A. (Manchester)—"The Possibility of a Rational Life."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Bristol Street Council Schools, Birmingham) : 7.0, Mr. G. Bedborough—"Godlessness."

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Laycock's Forum, Kirkgate) : 7.15, A mock trial: "Prisoner Charged with Heresy." Prosecuting and Defending Counsel. Audience are Jury. Come and take your part.

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley) : 2.30, Mr. H. P. Turner—"The Origin of Christmas."

EDINBURGH BRANCH N.S.S. (Free Gardeners' Hall, Picardy Place, Edinburgh) : 7.0, Dr. F. Smithies—"Logic and Modern Physics."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow) : 7.0, Thos. Robertson, B.Sc., M.B., Ch.B.—"Buddhism—Its Origins and Beliefs."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Transport Hall, Islington, Liverpool, entrance in Christian Street) : 7.0, Walter Parry (Liverpool)—"Taking the Sun out of Sunday."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (King's Café, 64-66 Oxford Road, Manchester, near All Saints Church) : 7.0, Mr. Beilby (Anti-Vivisection Society)—"Superstitions of Scientists."

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Green Street) : 7.30, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

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