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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

On Toleration

A LEADING article in an old issue of the "Universe," the chief Roman Catholic organ in this country, discussed the question of toleration. It is not an easy subject for a Catholic to deal with, representing as he does a Church which has become a byword for intolerance all over the civilized world. In this country, at least, a Catholic apologist must not avow himself against toleration—public opinion would be against him; on the other hand, he must not favour it lest he brings from his opponents a reply in the shape of a reference to the practice and theory of the Church he represents, and from his religious superiors a reprimand for placing all religious opinions upon the same level. At the same time, I agree with the "Universe" that it does not lie well with Protestants to charge the Roman Church with either intolerance or persecution. If it has persecuted over a longer period than Protestantism, it is because it has had a longer history. If the Roman Church has persecuted on a larger scale it is because it has wielded greater power. There is not an instance of a Protestant Church having the power to persecute and not availing itself of the opportunity to do so. And we owe to Protestantism the establishment on the statute books of Europe and America of the principle of persecution for religious opinions. It was Protestantism that gave Europe a legally established State Church, and which made religion an essential part of the State. The Protestant Church was a department of the State. The Roman Church aimed at making the State a department of the Church. Until Protestantism appeared, there was no law in Europe which compelled a man to be a Christian, much as the State might help the Church to enforce uniformity of belief.

The Church and the Other Man

It is well to have before us the Roman Catholic theory of toleration and persecution, as prepared for the consumption of a non-Catholic audience, and I take this opportunity of summarising it. Toleration implies two things:—

"One is that a man has every right to choose any religion he wishes. The other is that while some religions may, for various reasons, be preferable to others, all are in reality equally lawful. A moment's consideration suffices to show that these are principles to which no Catholic can possibly assent. . . Catholics know that God has revealed a religion to man. That being so we have no right to reject it, although we have the power to do so. It follows from this that the Church must be doctrinally intolerant. She cannot admit other religions on an equal footing with herself. She alone has the right to teach mankind."

The writer adds that the Church has no power to compel assent to her teaching or to convert mankind by force. Conversion must always be the result of conviction. On that an apt comment is, that persecution seldom arises because a man refuses to give assent to certain teachings, but more commonly because he desires to say what he thinks about them. No one has ever been quite stupid enough to think that one can change a man's opinions by force, but the question of persecution turns upon whether one is justified in punishing a man who will say that a thing is false when he believes it to be so. It is only when a man has been charged with rejecting a teaching that he has been called upon to justify himself by professing belief in it. And one would like to know how a Church which will not admit it to be lawful for a man to accept or reject any religion he pleases can, given the power, refrain from some kind of persecution.

Toleration Under Protest

It is admitted that in an "ideal State" in which the citizens are practically all Catholics, the government would foster the Church by all means in its power, and that in such a State heresy might well take the form of a "civil crime," "and be punished accordingly." In some Catholic countries, it is pointed out, "restrictions are made, and rightly, against Protestant propaganda as such."

"In other countries, where the State is indifferent to all religions, complete religious toleration is the order of the day, and this would remain so, even if Catholics came into power, unless and until the nation as a whole, of its own free will, embraced Catholicism, and thus became a Catholic State."

When, of course, the State would at once proceed to decree that heresy was a "civil crime," to be punished accordingly. So far, we do not seem to have advanced a long way from the position that a Christian will tolerate religious disbelief so long as he is unable to suppress it; but so soon as he can he will extirpate it because the Church "must of necessity be doctrinally intolerant," and has alone the right to teach mankind. It hardly needed a special article to tell us that while Catholics are not strong enough to suppress heresy they will put up with it, but so soon as the State is substantially Catholic they will feel justified in suppressing the noxious doctrine that "a man has every right to choose any religion he pleases." The writer is correct in saying that "no Catholic can possibly assent" to such a teaching. No Catholic ever has. No Christian Church has—once it had the power to act on the opposite assumption.

The Gentle Church

All the time there is the ugly fact that the Catholic Church has always persecuted, and has regarded the rooting out—by force—of heresy as one of its principal duties. This

fact is met, and glossed over, in a characteristically Catholic and Christian manner, thus:—

“In the Middle Ages, heresy was a civil crime as well as an ecclesiastical one; hence the State had the right to punish it. The Church of the time certainly condoned such civil punishment, but she never put anyone to death.”

The poor gentle Church! It was because the State made heresy a civil crime that it was punishable by the State and the heretic subjected to ecclesiastical discipline. The Church mistakenly condoned it. It was in the Middle Ages, and the times were rude (one wonders how many centuries it is since Francesco Ferrer was put to death, in Spain, at the instigation of the Church). But she never put anyone to death. Neither, we may say, did any judge on the English bench—he merely handed the criminal over to the sheriff of the county to be dealt with. So the Church and the condemned heretic. It did not condemn him to death, but merely pronounced him to be one of whom no hope of conversion was entertained; it cut him off from the Church, and “relaxed” him to the civil power for punishment. And the Church thought the burning of the heretic so meritorious that in some cases it gave an “indulgence” to anyone who would contribute wood to the pile. As a matter of fact, the secular power had no choice in the matter. The State that refused to punish the heretic would have been excommunicated. It is, perhaps, unkind to mention it, but the “Universe” has conveniently forgotten that Luther’s argument that the burning of heretics was contrary to the will of the Spirit was specifically condemned by Leo X., who was certainly not the most illiberal of the Popes. And St. Thomas Aquinas, who may be taken to have been as well informed as to the mind of the Medieval Church as is the editor of the “Universe,” lays it down very clearly that while the “tenderness of the Church” permits two warnings to be given heretics, if they are pertinacious they are to be abandoned to the secular power and removed by death. One must assume that it was the tenderness of the Church which caused the burning of heretics to take the form of a public holiday, or used to round off the festivities of a royal marriage or a coronation. I have often protested against the word “Christian” prefacing ordinary human virtues, but I really do think the phrase “Christian truth” is quite necessary. It is quite unlike all other kinds of truth, and calculated to make a professional liar turn green with envy.

Religion and the State

But in the Middle Ages, heresy was a civil crime, and the State had the right to punish it. Well, but how did it become a civil crime? The Roman Church, as Hobbes well said, was the ghost of the old Roman Empire. It inherited a deal from the pagan Empire, but not laws against heresy. Any of the Roman Emperors would have looked with amazement at a judge who suggested that a man should be burnt to death because he had different ideas from his neighbour concerning the gods. The laws against heresy in the Medieval world were wholly of Christian origin, and owed their being directly to the bigotry of the Church. The readers of the “Universe” are probably not aware of this, and religious intolerance is so much of a commonplace to the Christian mind, and so common a thing in Christian history, that the average Christian mind finds it difficult to

conceive a Society in which they did not exist. For some centuries the Church managed to deal with such heresy as existed, for once having used the secular power to establish itself, it could maintain its position in virtue of its hold over the grossly superstitious minds of the people. It was not until the twelfth century that the Church forced the secular rulers of Europe to undertake the suppression of heresy, and to create laws for its detection and suppression. Princes were commanded to take the oath before their bishops that they would enforce the ecclesiastical laws against heresy, and any default was met with the terrible penalty of excommunication. Church Council after Church Council laid down rules for the detection of heresy, and for its punishment. Says Henry C. Lea, in his classic History of the Inquisition:—

“From the emperor to the meanest peasant, the duty of persecution was enforced with all the sanctions, spiritual and temporal, which the Church could command. Not only must the ruler enact rigorous laws to punish heretics, but he and his subjects must see them strenuously executed, for any slackness of persecution was, in the canon law, construed as favourship or heresy, putting a man on his purgation.”

Unquestionably, in the Middle Ages, heresy was a civil crime. The statement is quite correct. But the “Universe” has omitted to tell its readers how it became so. It has omitted to inform its dupes that punishment for heresy came into the civil law of Europe, because the Church insisted on it being there, and has fought for it being kept there right through the centuries. I have previously said that there is no instance of any Christian Church having the power to persecute, and refraining from doing so. I add one other point. Is there an example of any Christian Church standing forward demanding from the civil power the abolition of all laws against heresy? I do not know of any such instance.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be concluded)

SIXTY YEARS IN THE N.S.S.

IN doing a little spring cleaning recently in my “library” I came across a small cardboard cylinder containing my certificate of membership of the National Secular Society. Mine had been making a little searching for truth, but the lower left hand corner was still intact where the date stood out clearly—“1885.” whilst in the right hand corner, equally clear, appeared the signature of the president—“C. Bradlaugh.” I daresay there are other members with equally long records, but there can’t be many, and as old men are reputed to have good memories for things that happened fifty years ago although they forget what occurred yesterday, it seemed to me that some of my impressions might interest the present generation. On the other hand they might not. Anyhow, here goes.

I don’t think I was ever a real Christian child. My mother, who was left a widow with four children to support at the age of 40 no doubt would have called herself a Christian, but the only principle she impressed upon me at any time was the importance of self respect. I doubt whether I was christened: we attended no place of worship and I was never sufficiently well dressed to attend Sunday school. My earliest schooling was at two Church schools, one attached to Lambeth Palace, still extant, I believe.

But I cannot recollect learning anything there. My real elementary education was obtained at Hatfields. There I was instructed in the Christian Religion according to the School Board for London. I won a prize which I still treasure, a beautiful bound copy of the New Testament. "Given by Francis Peek and the Religious Tract Society to the pupils of the London Board Schools who excelled in Biblical knowledge."

In the early 80's everyone was talking about Bradlaugh. I obtained my first knowledge of him from the ballad singers in the market place. One couplet of this deathless verse remained in my memory: "He'll stick to it, He'll stick to it. If they throw him from the window, the door he will come through it." This was enough to inspire any schoolboy with admiration. I knew nothing of the merits of the case, but for some time Bradlaugh was bracketed with Horatius.

My first contact with Freethought was seeing the Christmas number of the "Freethinker" pasted on sheets of cardboard and exhibited at the bookshop of C.C. Cattell in Fleet Street. This must have been in 1882 when I went into Fleet Street to make my fortune. I had never heard of the prosecution which preceded that. But the first real Freethinker I met was a man named Curtis, a printers' cutter, with whom I was employed. Until this meeting my knowledge of books was confined to a few novels by Captain Marryatt and Miss Braddon, plus about a thousand penny numbers of "Black Bess," or the "Knight of the Road." A few years ago I should have been ashamed to make this confession, but more recently I have read in a volume published to celebrate the centenary of the establishment of the highly respectable firm of Hazell, Watson & Viney, who were the first printers of "Black Bess," that the literary quality of this work was far above that of the ordinary "penny blood" of the period. So I had been acquiring a taste for good literature without knowing it.

Curtis became my new tutor. Under his guidance I devoured Paley's "Evidences," Butler's "Analogy," Viscount Amberley's "Analysis." I borrowed Lecky's "Rationalism" and "Morals" and Drapers' "Intellectual Development" from the library. I bought the three volumes of "Supernatural Religion" in Clare Market and six volumes of Gibbon in the New Cut. I had to skip the Greek in the first purchase, but I obtained as much pleasure from the second as I had derived from "Black Bess."

One Sunday morning walking along the Albert Embankment I came across an open-air meeting. The neat platform bore the lettering "National Secular Society." I attended several of these meetings, hearing Moss, Heaford, Calvert, and other "saints." I made the acquaintance of Victor Roger and in the following year joined the N.S.S. and shortly afterwards became the branch secretary at the suggestion of Mr. Foote.

I attended the meetings in the Hall of Science, and Messrs. Bradlaugh, Foote and Robertson became my Holy Trinity.

Before joining the N.S.S. I was taking an interest in current politics. Most of the men with whom I worked were Radicals. They read each morning the Parliamentary reports in the "Daily News," worshipped the Grand Old Man and Mr. Chamberlain and cursed Lord Randolph Churchill. I learned my political creed from the "Weekly Despatch" and enjoyed "Mustard and Cress" in "The Referee," written by George R. Sims before he became rich and conservative. Consequently Sunday mornings at the Hall of Science had a special attraction for me. Then Mr. Bradlaugh used to deal with political questions, reserving theological ones for the evening meetings. These were the early days of propaganda of the Social Democratic Federation when to attack a leading Radical who had the ears of the workers was of more importance than to attack the conservative or capitalist. So they made a dead set at Bradlaugh. There came John Burns, already showing grey hairs although only about 28 years of age, Herbert Barrows, Jimmy Macdonald for many years afterwards Secretary of the London Trades Council, and sometimes a gentleman named

Gilbert Marks. Mr. Bradlaugh treated them with his usual courtesy, but gave them each a whipping, making no difference in his treatment of the last named opponent who was actually an employee of Bradlaugh, a compositor employed in the production of the "National Reformer." In those times few employees would have dared to interfere with their employer's politics; but Marks knew his "Boss."

Bradlaugh was really a great man who achieved his motto of "Thorough." Like many other great men, however, he had little sympathy with ordinary human frailty. There was at this time a young man on the freethought platform named Arthur Harlow (afterwards known as B. Hyatt), who must have possessed an extraordinary memory, as his lectures consisted of reproductions of Robert Taylor's "Devil's Pulpit." Upon these he was word perfect. But he could seldom remember his lecturing engagements. On the second occasion of his failure to keep his appointment with me I complained to the President of his conduct. Mr. Bradlaugh sent me a characteristic reply: "The second time was my fault."

He was the very soul of punctuality. When he was billed to address a meeting at a certain time, you could safely put your watch right to the second when he appeared on the platform. But I thought he rather over-did it when he interrupted the proceedings of the International Freethought Congress at the Hall of Science in 1887, because he detected a slight difference between his watch and the clock over the platform.

There was a fairly prevalent idea among Christian people that G. W. Foote was a common, vulgar fellow. I think this idea must have originated by people seeing the "Freethinker" but never reading it. Its literary standard was high, but its typographical appearance was exceedingly low. Foote himself was a very superior person; in fact, perhaps a trifle too superior. He seemed sometimes to have been so long on the platform that he had forgotten to get off it. He was never vulgar. He was a writer and speaker of correct English, woven often into beautiful forms. He had no use for smirking euphemisms so popular with some, but if a spade was always a spade it was never a ruddy shovel. One Sunday evening when he was speaking in the Athenæum Hall in Tottenham Court Road, Mr. Passmore Edwards came in. Mr. Foote's address lasted for about an hour and twenty minutes and when questions and criticism were invited by the Chairman, Mr. Passmore Edwards rose and said he had never heard Mr. Foote before but in all his extensive experience of listening to public speakers he had never heard a lengthy speech so free from blemish as the one he had heard that night.

When the London Freethought Federation was formed of which Mr. Foote was President (Mr. Bradlaugh, of course, remaining President of the National body) he visited all the outdoor stations and delivered a free lecture. I attended the meeting held at Battersea Park gates, where he delivered a fine address although to me he was essentially an indoor orator. At the conclusion of his lecture a lady stepped forward and presented him with an enormous bouquet of flowers. At that time he was living in the northern end of the Caledonian Road, and I often wondered—but never asked him—what became of those flowers before he reached home.

F. A. DAVIES.

(To be concluded)

OUR ARCHBISHOP

The "Daily Sketch" prints a picture of the Archbishop of Canterbury turning the handle of a hurdy-gurdy to help a local institution. The "Sketch" says it is evident he understands the people. We are inclined to endorse this opinion. He *does* understand the people. The next question should be: Do the people understand him?

AN OPEN LETTER TO C. E. M. JOAD

DEAR Sir,—This seems the safest form of address. I notice your admirers are never quite sure what to call you. Some say "Doctor," others "Professor." Perhaps the latter do not know that once you disclaimed the title in the pages of "The New Statesman." You will remember that occasion when H. G. Wells broke through the defences always put up by your friend Kingsley Martin, when anyone attacks you. Of course, Kingsley Martin dare not attempt to blanket Wells; he is of weightier metal than either of you, as you tacitly admitted by the timidity of the answer in which you said you were not a Professor. Surely this would have surprised some people at Birkbeck College! Moreover some of us outside had thought you professed a vast amount of knowledge upon most things, though perhaps your performances on the Brains Trust, whilst they have increased your popularity, have hardly enhanced your reputation.

To many you have proved a great disappointment. Fainishness, if I may coin a word, is a disposition of youth. Most people in middle life have left it far behind. Yet I admit that ten years ago I was a little disposed to it in respect of yourself. I went eagerly to hear you; I encouraged others to do so. Then came a frost, a chilling frost upon my feelings. Why was it? I had a growing sense that you were a performer, but could never be a leader; that your career was more to you than your convictions. Boring you could not be, but as to the inspiration of a prophet, in time I began to feel I might just as well look for that to "Monday Night at Eight" in the B.B.C. programme.

"Consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," wrote Emerson, but he did not, I am sure, mean the wobbling of a man who wants to please all parties. You seem too much to desire to give your public what it wants. It was reported once in this paper that, lecturing for the Ministry of Information, you had said we had not enough religious education. Why did we not hear that at Conway Hall? Once, in a Sunday paper, you said that no great mind had ever accepted spiritualism. This audacious statement was not boldly uttered from the platform on a Sunday morning. Can it have been that you hesitated because an influential member of Conway Hall was a spiritualist? Parsons have to be careful of their deacons! I knew of one who indiscreetly advocated the views of the early Christian fathers on second marriages when a deacon was enjoying one. He did not hold his pulpit long.

Moreover, when a correspondent called you to task for this statement you ignored his letter, as you have ignored mine. You may remember when I caught you out in a few errors of fact. If I may use the language of cricket—I know that noble game makes no appeal to you—you always turn a blind eye to catches and go on batting. In short, though my letter was friendly and appreciative of your lectures, I received no acknowledgement. Once I wrote similarly to correct some errors of E.V. Lucas, a man of greater literary fame than yourself. I received in Lucas's own hand a charming letter of thanks and a promise of amendment in a new edition. I wrote recently a polite letter to you merely to obtain confirmation of a report of one of your cryptic utterances in a "Daily Express" Brains Trust. Although I enclosed a stamped addressed envelope, I received no reply. I am glad to say I have found greater men than C. E. M. Joad less Olympian. Probably you correspond only with equals. I have written a few books on London lore, and two of them have commanded a degree of publicity you might have envied, but what is such a low-browed subject to you?

Yet even in this god-like aloofness you are not always to be found. When you remonstrated with Campbell about going on the halls, he neatly retorted: "That wasn't your cup of tea, Joad." Some of us had heard of the advertisement on the films before it was mentioned in a book on the B.B.C. It had made us feel uncomfortably that there might be some wisdom in the

discerning critic who, being asked what Joad was professor of, replied "Publicity."

Then there is that pacifist book "Why War?", written after "Munich week." You were obviously disconcerted when, last summer a reader of the "Daily Telegraph" disinterred it. You must admit that an oracle must sag a bit after the following quotations have been revealed:—

"A number of considerations suggest that, in the event of war, the withdrawal of the support of a great mass of the people from the Nazi Government is not by any means unlikely.

It is my belief that if the programme which I have suggested for a world conference were faithfully carried out, and if this country did in fact disarm and render itself defenceless, then we should never be bombed at all. . . . One cannot bomb those who have neither the means nor the will to resist."

Recently the papers have been full of the horrors of German concentration camps. Following you one might have said: "You cannot torture those who have no means to resist or run away." The answer is that Nazis found it quite possible, even enjoyable.

I must conclude with some remarks about your relations with South Place Ethical Society. There is a story of Jowett of Balliol hearing of an undergraduate with Atheistic proclivities. "Mr. Blank," said the Master, "you will find a god by the end of the week or you will go down." Perhaps some were a little hard on you, but there were those who thought your conversion a convenient one. Did it not put you in a more respectable class than Huxley (considered a superior mind by some misguided people) and, with the orthodox, on a level with the egregious Campbell. You did not insist upon bringing your new god to Conway Hall, but you came to us and said that you would still like to have some place where you had liberty to declare your whole mind. This was understandable, from your point of view, but how unedifying to us! We had sat under erect spirits like John M. Robertson, John A. Hobson, and C. Delisle Burns. Would they have stooped even to enter Broadcasting House? You referred to what you were *allowed* to discuss. What a humiliating word for a Freethinker in any sense of that word! We had a feeling that it would be better to decline the big B.B.C. fee—to be poor but intellectually honest.

I am glad now to be assured by the Editor of the Conway Hall "Record" regarding yourself "that there is a growing feeling that further invitations should not be frequent as it is generally recognised that he is no longer a satisfactory exponent of the Society's general attitude." It is high time when we got a kind of Pott-Slurk warfare of one Conway Hall lecturer on another—in the "Literary Guide" Archibald Robertson referred to your "anti-scientific twaddle" and "shallow rubbish"—that you should depart.

I fear our young Freethinkers must look to the old for their inspiration. Men like H. G. Wells, Joseph McCabe and Chapman Cohen have their roots in the far Victorian past, when men were bold. John Stuart Mill, whom I have heard you praise, was almost a fanatical flaunter of public applause; Leslie Stephen did not mind jeopardising his editorship of the "Cornhill Magazine" and the "Dictionary of National Biography" by writing a book with the well-merited title "Freethinking and Plain thinking." John Morley never pandered to the piety of his political chief, W. E. Gladstone. I wish, Sir, I could believe you capable of such courage. I regret to say I cannot. Once we had men; now we have a plethora of puppets. However, I did once hear you say that you so favoured freedom of the air that you would have it even at the price of subsidies by advertisers. Dare I believe that this is an opinion you have not changed? I hope so, for I regard the B.B.C. as one of the greatest menaces to intellectual liberty this country has ever known.

So, Sir, Conway Hall has dropped you as a pilot. "For this relief much thanks." It would have been better had you never been taken aboard. I, however, was amongst the beguiled, and cannot blame others. You have ended there the career of a disappointing man. An episode in the history of South Place Ethical Society has now terminated that most of us will be glad to forget. We shall pass onward, not through your presence.

Your ungodly,
WILLIAM KENT.

THE CHINAMAN

By the Village Grocer

I HAVEN'T always been a Village Grocer for I was born in the East End of London in a village called Poplar, and I was no doubt a precocious sort of kid, anyway I was in the right place to learn something, and as usual I suppose I was as good and as bad as the next kid. At thirteen years of age I had passed the seventh standard, and I had to leave school to help support the home. I had been for about four years the organist at a Mission Hall and the Missionary used his influence to get me a job. And what a job it was, in a small soap factory. My job was to stamp fancy soap in a hand machine, rather a heavy job for a kid of thirteen. Wages 6s. a week, 8 a.m. till 6 p.m. and 1 p.m. on Saturdays, one hour for dinner, making 50 hours a week, equal to about 1½d. per hour. The owner of the place was the man who helped to support the Mission Hall and was regarded as a good Christian, and I must say when he came to the hall he looked like one, the people clapped him, by order of the Missionary who always got the hall full by giving a free tea before he arrived. Of course the Missionary always praised him up and spoke about his goodness to the Mission, but he never told them of the organist who was working 50 hours a week for him for 6s. Having a penny piece of fish and a penny-worth of spuds in a dirty slum fish shop; sitting on a stool at a ledge in the shop every day for his dinner. Of course that might have spoilt the pleasure of having him at the meeting.

To get the money for the tea the Missionary used to go sponging among a few of his more influential friends. He could not ask my boss for the tea money, and if he hadn't given a tea the hall would probably only had about a dozen worshippers present.

The manager of the soap works occasionally came with him to sing. He had a decent voice, one that any deaf old man could hear, and he had a couple of stock songs, "The Better Land" and "The Holy City," and was always introduced as the "famous baritone," Mr. Hunt.

Whilst I was in his employ he came for the first time and gave me the music of the "Better Land." He must have thought I was gifted or something for I could not play it and told him so. He looked stunned. "What," says he "cannot play it? What- ever am I to sing?" I suggested one of Sankey's hymns. "Hymns," said he, "I don't sing them." I could have told him that, for there were a couple of girls at the works who used to have to listen to his rotten stories to keep the soft jobs they had; they never sang hymns.

Anyway I did my best with the "Better Land." The next morning he told me I was a rotten organist and spoilt his singing. Unfortunately I was telling another boy about it and he heard me say he was a dud singer and I guess he wished I was in the "Better Land." He promised to clump me, but I told him I would tell the gov'nor if he did, so he compromised by owing me a grudge.

Well, one dinner hour I was walking around Limehouse Causeway and I saw a Chinaman run over by a pony and van. The man was prostrated and I went to his assistance. I noticed the Chinamen on their doorsteps went in and shut the doors. I sent a boy to get a policeman and the policeman sent me for an ambulance at the police station. It was a kind of barrow; two policemen came with it and I had to go to the station and say what I had seen, as the driver had not stopped or taken any notice. By the time I got back to work I was twenty minutes late. I could not start without seeing the manager (my friend the singer). "Hallo!" said he, "What cock and bull story have you got in the way of excuse?" I explained the case to him. "My boy," said he, "you will have to tell a better lie than that to get away with it." "What!" said I, "I'm no liar, Sir." "No," said he, "and no organist." "And no singer," said I. With that I got the sack. When I told my folks at home my father said "I'll see into the matter," for I don't think he believed me. Anyway the police verified it, and the gov'nor, when the Missionary told him, said I was to be re-instated, but I had to apologize to the manager.

I said "Never." My father backed me up, and I walked the streets looking for a job for a month or more.

The poor Chinaman died of his injuries and although there were several of his kin who saw the accident, no one came forward and the carman was never found.

Did God know I was walking about looking for a job? Did God know about the Chinaman? There appeared to me to be a doubt about it. Kid that I was, I felt something wrong. I walked about looking for a job. I was condemned by the Missionary and I remembered sitting at the organ with my overcoat on because I had no seat in my trousers. Did God know? Anyway, something seemed to discourage me, and I soon left my voluntary job as organist.

F. G. REEVES.

THE TEETOTALLER AND HIS COLD

A Parable

THERE was a certain man who had been a teetotalter for many years. And he dwelt in the house of another who was not a teetotalter.

Now, it came to pass that he who was a teetotalter was seized with a grievous cold. So he spake to his friend, saying:—

"What remedy shall I partake of to rid me of this most grievous torment? For 'tis but the seventh hour, and even now have I wetted six handkerchiefs, and my nose still runneth abundantly."

And he who was not a teetotalter answered unto him, and spake thus: "There is an excellent remedy for the cold, known unto men, even as 'Rum.'" Now, it came to pass that they betook themselves unto the house of the vendor of rum. And he who was not a Rechabite said: "Take a glass."

And behold the taste was goodly in his mouth so that he marvelled thereat, and spake: "That I may be more effectually cured of this most distressing malady I shall once more partake of this most efficacious remedy."

Then when he had partaken, not once, nor twice, but many times, his spirits revived, and he lifted up his voice, and rejoiced exceedingly in the songs of his youth. And he would have danced for very joy but that the floor was uneven, and a strange weakness fell upon his limbs. So he sat him down in a corner, and wept, saying that he grieved for his grandmother who had died in the poorhouse forty years ago—before the War. But verily he again waxed strong, and rising to his full stature, he gloried in his strength, saying that he would engage in mortal combat

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ACID DROPS

While the praise of the Prime Minister is on we note that in 1934, Mr. Churchill fought a battle royal against the attempts of the B.B.C. censoring a speech he wished to give (Mr. Churchill was anything but popular at that time). At length he had his way: We wonder what help he would give, if returned, to get the privilege given to all public characters, instead of forcing them to become tools of the B.B.C.—for the sake of advertising themselves.

We find that about the time of this struggle we laid down some rules as a method of stopping this murder of independence by the B.B.C. We said then that the B.B.C. might be divided into three classes:—

(1) Those who value their independence and dignity enough to decline to submit to censorship. These did not last long with the B.B.C.

(2) Those who value publicity more than dignity and independence.

(3) Those who don't care a damn about their independence or duty to the public so long as the B.B.C. fees are forthcoming.'

To add to this we suggest to the new House of Commons—candidates who will be full of honesty, love of liberty, devotion to freedom, etc., etc.—that one of the first aims of the new Government should be to put an end to the stiffening of opinion by the B.B.C.

"God in his goodness," chortles Archbishop Griffin, "has blessed us and our cause. The evil things against which we took arms lie scattered." Excellent! But why did not God exert his influence in 1939, or even earlier, instead of waiting until the Armed Forces against Hitlerism set to work? The Allies were not more determined to beat the Germans than the Germans were to beat the Allies. And, evidently, God was sitting on the fence waiting to see which side looked like winning. The Deity was acting like a man on a racecourse—waiting to put his money on the horse that is running best. The foolishness of Archbishop Griffin is an insult to the men and women who did so much to help break Nazism. We can only add that God has the followers he deserves, or—the other way about—men get the God they deserve. And in either instance they get into a hell of a mess until common sense steps in.

The Archbishop of York recently declared that Atheism is bunkum. As a dealer in bunkum for many years, the Archbishop should be an authority on that material. But a brother priest writes that it has been his task to interview young men with regard to their religious standing. He says he was "appalled to learn that they did not know the first things about religion." It looks as though the craving for religion is not so strong as the Archbishop would have us believe.

The "Universe" which never, if it can avoid it, mentions the "Freethinker," cannot but pay the Freethought movement a compliment. For example, it solemnly warns its followers that "no Catholic should attend lectures or read books published under the auspices of the National Secular Society, the aim of which is the abolition of the Christian Church." That is quite plain, and it is completely Christian. Once upon a time the publications of such a body as the N.S.S. would have led to the prison or the stake. Now it can only warn people not to read their publications. We are quite certain that many of its followers will follow the advice given. The worse of it is that a great many Roman Catholics will act on this advice. We say this not because it affects us, but because it affects those human sheep who have not the courage to walk alone.

But let us be fair all round. The Roman Church issues this order openly, but the other Churches and their followers lack the courage openly to say it. They prefer to stab in the back. We could, in very little time, collect a large number of shop-keepers

who are afraid to show our publications, either because, as they say, "We should lose our customers," and of others who say in plain language that they would not show them because they do not "believe" in them. But in the main it is the "boycott" that affects tradesmen. In principle we fail to see much difference between Roman Catholics and non-Catholics. The Christian religion is always a kind of social poison however it may be expressed.

Most of us are wondering what we ought to do in this or that situation. The Bishop of Liverpool gives us a helping hand. He says we must praise (God), we must pray (to God) and we must pay. Of the three the only certain one is the last. We must pay. But what should we praise God for? The Bishop says we must praise God for winning the war. But someone had to win the war, and in what degree can we count that God did anything at all. And surely whether God had interfered or not someone would have won it. And if God won the war why did he not do it earlier? We suppose he could have done it in 1940 just as well as in 1945. And if he could every man with "guts" would surely have little further to do with anyone who could have given us peace five years ago instead of standing by and saying: "Well, there's only about a million killed up to now, when a few more millions have died we will step in and settle things."

Quite seriously, is it ignorance that makes this Bishop talk in this way, or is it just business? Or is that message a kind of hint to the world that his congregation lacks the intelligence of a jackass, or has the callousness of a chief of a Nazi concentration camp?

Bells have played a part in the Christian religion, although as with nearly all the outstanding features of the Church it belongs to the superstitions practice of the lower order of humans. The original purpose was to keep away evil spirits while the service to God was being observed. If any doubt of the matter exists, a report from Coggeshall should set the matter straight. The church bell had been damaged by a bomb. The vicar managed to save the bell, and then very solemnly he set to work, re-blessed it, and no evil spirit will be able to get near. But there will be plenty of standing room for fools.

The praise of the Bible—the old Bible—in forming character is not heard so frequently as was the case some forty or fifty years ago. But we do occasionally meet it. Here is an example that we take from an estimate of the quality of one of our leaders: "How much of this firmness of character and uprightness of spirit did he owe to his constant reading of the 'Great Book.'" All that this means is that the party in question read the Bible. But if he had not read the Bible he might have read something else and so found an explanation in a different direction.

The one thing noticeable is that these people never tell us where were the exact passages in the Bible that moulded their character. Such explanations as "a regular reading," "the feeling that I was in the presence of God," etc., etc., will not do. As a matter of fact in most cases it is not the Bible that moulds people, it is just as often the case that it is the reader that moulds the Bible.

And that is true of religion in general. It was not the Bible or the New Testament that made people disgusted with the doctrine of Hell, it was the development of a more sensitive mind that made Hell impossible to all decent-minded men and women. Humanitarianism did not come from the Bible, it was humanitarianism that made the Bible a little more humane than it would otherwise have been. Gods do not make good men, but good men make better gods. The old saying that gods lead to a better life should be reversed. The right reading is that man led the gods to a healthier humanity. There never has been a god who could not be bettered by "his creatures."

The Archdeacon of Korogwo (S. Africa) is seriously concerned at the menace of Secularism. He wants to see South Africa thoroughly Christianised. We believe that is the desire of most of those in South Africa who believe that the proper place for the native is in the background—or underground—and will play the designed part that is theirs which is, of course, that of being the servants of the white invaders.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Farnival Street, Holborn,
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601. London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- W. THURGOOD.—Thanks. Will be very useful.
- V. MORGAN.—Conway's "Life of Paine" is, we believe, out of print. It is the authoritative work on the subject.
- For "The Freethinker."—C. W. Hollingham, £1.
- H. EDWARDS.—We were never foolish enough to even think that the war would kill Christianity. But we are certain that the reaction of the war will make the clergy feel rather sick.
- BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges a donation of 5s. from Mr. J. S. Lessels, and 9s. from Mrs. Richard Carlile, to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.
- J. BARTON.—Mirabeau's "Erotika Biblion" is out of print and would be difficult to obtain.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Farnival 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.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture notices must reach 2 and 3, Farnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

A General Election is now upon us. We take no part in politics, but we suggest that before voting those who are at all interested in Education should remember the dishonesty that lies behind the new Education Act. That an Education Act had to come was obvious. And the new Act provides a few improvements, but leaves "Education Free, Secular and Compulsory" the cry of the men who brought into existence our first Education Act. But political manœuvring provided us with an Education that was not free, till lately; it did not provide a clear road to the university, neither did it keep education secular. The two last we still need.

And this for good reasons. The new Act hands the schools over to the Churches, so far as the Government dare do it. And it does not make fitness the only entrance to the "upper" schools and to Universities. Making it possible for some of the "people's" children will not do. Entrance to the higher schools should be available only to those who win their way by their ability. The reaction of our present system is that we have for governors incapables where we should have capables only. Readers will find scores of instances in the political world, and the establishment of nincompoops in high places.

Here is a curious item from a medical man writing of his wartime experience. He says that the sight of wounded bodies and the moans of the suffering men suggest "the impalpable, but nevertheless real, feeling of standing for a moment in the presence of the Creator." Truth will out, but we may take it that the doctor did not realise all that his statement involves.

The way in which a Canadian preacher cheers up his people:—
"Our country is at war; our sons and brothers are going to the front; our Empire is engaged in the most deadly struggle it ever knew—yet—God is good.

The dead lie unburied, the wounded untended, and death is everywhere in the air, on land, and on sea—yet—God is good.

The rumours of cold-blooded cruelty take us back to heathen wars, and evil seems to ride triumphant across the fields of carnage, and yet we hold that God is good.

From bloody field, from battle-scarred city, from homeless wanderers, and from hundreds of thousands of weeping women and children, the cry of human anguish arises in unceasing moan, for men have turned this earth into a veritable Valley of Tears, and yet above it all the stars shine still, and Love is Lord of All.

For this sure faith of the Church we cannot but give thanks. The battle-fury is brutal and hellish, but it shall pass away; the riot of ruin and death is infinitely terrible, but it shall not continue; for on the throne Love sits eternally.

Let us give thanks."

Strong opposition is being offered by the United Protestant Council against the promise made by the Government to donate £100,000 to the building of a mosque in London. But why not? We subsidise the Christian Churches very heavily, and we have very large numbers of Mohammedans under our rule. Moreover, we are not certain which is the "true" God, or whether there is a god of any kind. So we think we ought to back both sides. Moreover we are Democrats, a fact given by the leader of the Tory party, and most of our multimillionaires, and should treat gods and men alike. It would be a sad thing if when we enter the next world we found out that we had backed the wrong. So we advise if you think there may be gods offer your prayers to the lot. That will show—in the next world—that we mean well.

The Archbishop of York says that we must not fraternise with German pastors and congregations until we know more about them. But we remember that Jesus advised his followers to be good to those who spitefully use you, to turn one cheek when the other one is smacked. It seems something like the advice that one should never go into the water until he is able to swim.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Executive Annual Report, 1945

(By THE PRESIDENT)

FOR the sixth time the N.S.S. Conference meets in conditions that are unique in our history. We hope they will be the last. The past six years have been a period of strain and trial, of danger and disruption such as this country has never before experienced, and in the case of a loosely knitted propagandist movement such as ours it might well have ended in complete disruption. The situation reminds one of a story that goes back to the stormy days of the French Revolution of 1789. A man, noted for his boasting, was asked what he did in the Revolution. He replied "I lived," and in sober truth that was something of an achievement. Looking back at these six years we might say with pride that we continued during one of the most trying periods of our history. Many of those who carried on the work were whisked away to some other area or joined the fighting forces. Halls ceased to be available for public meetings, and travelling was reduced to a minimum. The dark streets acted as a curfew and kept people at home. These six years covered a period that we may now look back on with interest, but which we lived through with considerable discomfort.

We, like the Frenchman, may properly take pride that we lived, and in a time when established theories began to rock, and familiar institutions bit the dust.

Merely to live during this world-war was an achievement, but we did more than survive. We are stronger in every essential way than we were when the war began. Our membership has

increased, and some of these applications for membership have come direct from the battlefield. Our financial sources are growing, and we are in a position to undertake operations that we have hitherto not been able to handle. The sale of our literature, through the medium of the "Pioneer Press," was dictated by the amount of paper we could secure. For the first time in our history we have had to refuse subscriptions for the "Freethinker." We feel justified in saying that we have made advances because we fought to live and faced difficulties with a smile. When we cease to fight we shall no longer deserve survival.

Inevitably the war has to a very considerable extent affected for the worse the activities of some of our branches. Ardent workers have been transported to other parts of the country, or have been taken into the army. But this did not prevent their spreading freethought among the people. The proselytising habit will out. In cases the change of life has created a renewed interest in Freethought.

The extent to which Freethought has been carried into the Forces is marked. Our plan for sending free copies of the "Freethinker" on the advice of one who already subscribes has been practised with success. We also have accounts of discussions among the men and women, sometimes with the padre taking part. That is all to the good. Religion never gains from open discussion. Modern warfare calls for a more lively intelligence than did the armies of a century ago. Again we have to regret the paper shortage which prevents more in the shape of propaganda than has been done.

We must not omit reporting the large number of cases in which both men and women in the services have had their religious declaration altered to "none." Sometimes there is a little trouble in effecting this re-registration, but often it is admitted without comment. There is also an increase in those who insist on being registered when joining the Forces as being without religion. Open confession inspires to open work. It may be true that the Kingdom of Heaven is not to be taken by force, but the walls may crumble before the steady attack of plain truth.

In the home field organised propaganda has been seriously affected by the number of active workers that have been taken into the services. But we have the pleasure of reporting that new branches of the Society have been opened at Blackpool, Keighley, Cardiff and Belfast. Blackpool, bearing in mind the number of visitors that town has in the course of a year, should offer many opportunities for making new contacts. Much good could be done by increasing the distribution of literature. Keighley has opened very well and we wish it every success. An active canvass in that district should be useful. Cardiff has been neglected of late, but there must be a number of "ready-mades" who could be brought back to the secular fold. Belfast appears to have a number of members able to do good work with both tongue and pen. The Executive will give all reasonable help to these new societies. But it should be borne in mind that there are those who are born evangelists, and others who prefer to help quietly. Branches should plan their work so as to capture both types. Of other areas we may note that Birmingham is beginning to display some of its old-time fighting quality, with Mr. Smith as Secretary. Bradford is forging ahead with both indoor and outdoor meetings, and a judicious use of the Press. Mr. Corina deserves a word of appreciation, but the branch appears to have a number of good workers. Manchester is again showing increasing activity, and its secretary, Mr. McCall, is doing useful work with both tongue and pen. He comes of a good Freethinking family, and we look forward to his doing further good work. Mr. Clayton continues his roving commission in parts of Lancashire; and farther north Mr. Brighton keeps the clergy busy and people interested in his campaign which covers Durham and Northumberland. We could do with a number of men in this huge area.

Edinburgh suffered a severe loss in the death of Mr. Smithies, but has an able successor in Mr. Reilly. Glasgow has done well with its Sunday lectures in the Cosmo Cinema, but should get busier now that the war is moving to its close. It is interesting to note that Glasgow has had under various titles an unbroken history of Freethought propaganda for a full century-and-a-quarter. We suggest that here—and in other places—something in the nature of a canvass might prove useful.

London branches have suffered somewhat from the war, particularly in the matter of halls available for meetings. But the open air meetings go on despite bombs—flying and otherwise. Mr. Ebury continues his propaganda in North London with marked success. Somehow or the other he manages to produce a financial balance which is almost an offence to precedence. Mr. Barker is to be thanked for his work in Kingston-on-Thames. And the West London Branch runs very successful meetings in Hyde Park. The audiences are large, attentive, with a great number of English and American soldiers. Bearing in mind that these latter belong to widely different parts, at home and abroad, they can hardly avoid acting as "missionaries" for our cause. The branch has other "endeavours" in view during the season. Some very useful work is being done at Nottingham by Mr. Mosley.

Members will see that the Executive has received the sum of £200 from the estate of Mr. Rudd, an old and valuable member, and £5 from the estate of Mr. Austin Verney who was the author of scholarly articles in the "Freethinker."

One of the most striking pieces of propaganda was the receipt of an invitation to send a speaker to St. Christopher's Theological College, Chester, for Ladies. Mr. Rosetti undertook the task, and the result—a good audience, pleasant and interested. We are ready to send other speakers when required.

The Conference will probably remember that by the will of Mr. Chapman (of India), not a member of the N.S.S., but a very ardent "Freethinker" reader left an estate valued at about £10,000 giving two-thirds to the N.S.S. and one-third to the R.P.A. On purely technical grounds the case was contested by a relative. It has been dragging on since 1939. It has now been decided in favour of the testator. The costs will come as usual out of the estate. There are several things to be settled before the bequest is handed over.

We turn to other matters which fall within the legitimate concern of this Society. It will be remembered by many that some time back the customs officers seized a consignment of Freethinking books and pamphlets from the "Pioneer Press" and other publishers. The books were sent to the New York "Truth Seeker" and similar consignments had been passed without comment for many years. The officials had the impudence to say that because they were anti-religious publications and in any case were not in line with the war effort, they could not be permitted to pass. Quite properly the "Truth Seeker" entered action, and issued an appeal for funds. The editor of the "Freethinker" asked readers to supply £100, and this was done in a single post and other moneys declined.

When the writ was threatened the customs released the goods, but quite properly the "Truth Seeker" refused to withdraw the case. The soundness of the judgment was proven by the verdict being given in their favour. One smells Roman Catholic action in this case.

Another event which proves that the price of liberty is eternal watchfulness was shown in a police court in London. An action was brought against a number of men charged with a breach of war-time law. At the end of the first police court hearing, the case was adjourned and the magistrate offered to liberate the accused persons on two sureties of £500 each. Probably the magistrate suspected the terms would not be met, but on the bailiffs asking to affirm, a choice that is every citizen's right, the magistrate threw down his papers, said he would trust no one

who would not take a religious oath and left the Bench. The defence acted promptly and at once made an appeal to a Judge in Chambers, and an order was issued that the bail be accepted. That incident was closed. But magistrates who refuse to carry out the law should resign their post.

Another illustration of the need for vigilance is to be found in the new Education Act. Under cover of concern for a better education our war-time government succeeded in passing a Bill which restored to the Churches a great deal of the power they lost by the Education Act of 1870. But there is one way in which we may hope to affect even the government of the day—the right of parents to withdraw their children from all religious lessons and services. If that be done, the result may at least prevent the declared aim of the Archbishop of Canterbury to have the schools “saturated” with Christianity. Our aim is to secure justice all-round, and to end the breeding of Christians as though children were mere animals.

Among those of our members and friends who have joined the great majority we count Mr. R. B. Harrison (London), Charles Rudd (Luton), Frank Rudd (Luton), Alderman John Badly (Leeds), Mr. F. E. Wakefield, J.P. (Halifax), Alderman G. Hall (Manchester), Mrs. Hall (Manchester), Frank Smithies (Edinburgh), H. C. White (West Ham), Austin Verney (London), John Beggs (Belfast), William Rowe (S. Africa), A. W. Millward (Devon), F. A. Gubbins (Southport), W. Pitt (Birmingham), F. Steiner (U.S.A.), John Richards (Durham), F. W. R. Silkes; Barrister (Cape Town), J. Kinniburgh (Glasgow).

To the friends and relations of these we offer our sincere and respectful sympathy. Death whenever or however it comes means snapping a link of personal attachment of someone for whom we have deep regard. Death brings sorrow in its train, but it should never produce fear. It is respect and affection that gives us the pain of parting, it is affection and time which together create memories that become our dearest possessions. Shelley was right when he said:—

All things that we love and cherish,
Like ourselves should fade and perish,
Such is our poor mortal lot,
Love itself would were it not.

It was mentioned in our last Conference that efforts were being made to revive the International Freethought Association. We are glad, thanks largely to Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner, this is well on the way towards success. The opportunity of Freethinking refugees in this country (how tyrants everywhere hate Freethought) was taken and several meetings were held. It is fitting that the grandson of Charles Bradlaugh, who created the old International, would play an initiative part in this matter. Your representatives at the Conference have promised financial support to the movement.

On several of these gatherings it has been noted that the time was approaching when we should have to consider the need of enlarging our office staff. The work, we are glad to say, grows from more to more, and promises to go on increasing. What has been said does not suggest that work is neglected. It is not. But those who understand life also know that the most fruitful moment is not when one is racing round to do something that must be done, but when one has sufficient spare time to do something that might be accomplished. We have a good and conscientious Secretary and nothing is neglected. But little or no surplus time is left in which to attempt new adventures. As your President I suggest it is time that you considered the matter. Your President also begs to remind you that there is nothing quite so extravagant as a stretched economy.

On a general survey we may well say that the outlook for our movement is better than it has been. We are not what the world calls wealthy, but we have rid ourselves of the miserable poverty

that flourished when your President joined the N.S.S. some fifty-five years ago. We have an income that can take advantage of opportunities. And the best opportunities are those we make. The main sustainers of the Churches to-day are not those who seriously believe their treasured superstitions. The main support of Christianity are the powers that stand behind the Church for their own ends. If we had to fight sincere believers in Christianity, the battle to-day would be sharp and quickly decided. But we have not. Anyone who studies critically to-day knows that religion is very largely a screen for selfishness, dishonesty, intolerance and all the other memories of the thirteen furies. Wait, wait, the timid cry, the time is not yet—and this is said in the face of the rise of the Russia of to-day. The question here is not whether the Russian rule is good or bad. It is simply that you have before you the demonstrated fact that human nature is pliable, the older it is the more pliable it is. Whether you are working for good or evil is the only question at issue.

But if we develop, we must be impatient to work, and never-ending in our efforts. We have an example of the price paid for indolence and timidity by the reinstating of the Churches in the schools, in the futile cry that we cannot afford this or that necessity, and yet can spend about eleven million pounds a day when necessary. We have, as an organisation, selected for our aim an attack on the intrusion of religion in normal life. If we are to meet with success we must fix on our enemy wherever he is found, and under whatever disguise he dons. We believe that Freethought is the life line of a progressive humanity. Lose that lifeline and we lose all. We Freethinkers have a noble past; we should see to it that we are worthy of our heritage.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

THE N.S.S. Conference for the past year was held in the Holborn Hall. The chair was taken precisely at 10.30 a.m. by Mr. Chapman Cohen. There was an excellent gathering of members and delegates, the latter including one from Belfast.

The following Branches were represented:—

Bradford, Bristol, Burnley, Blackburn, Blackpool, Birmingham, Belfast, Chester-le-Street, Chester, Chorley, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Jarrow-on-Tyne, Kingston-on-Thames, Keighley, Manchester, North London, Newcastle, Nelson, North Staffs, Oxford, Swansea, Sunderland, Seaham, Tees-Side, West Ham, West London.

For the last time, it is hoped, the restrictions on the functions of the Congress were applied. But no one could complain either at the seriousness or the good humour of all present. The enthusiasm was marked. Of the principals, Mr. Rosetti was re-elected, and Mr. Chapman Cohen for the thirtieth time as President. Actually the N.S.S. has had but three presidents: Charles Bradlaugh, 1866; G. W. Foote, and Chapman Cohen. There was no mistaking the estimation in which the President stands in the minds of the members. Following came the re-appointment of Mr. R. H. Rosetti as Secretary. Many tributes were paid, including the high praise of the President. The re-election of the Executive was in accord with the agreement arrived at during the first year of war.

Before the adjournment for lunch the President asked to be relieved of attendance in the afternoon session. He was quite well, but age will have its way, pleasantly or unpleasantly, and eight hours work is not the best of preparations for addressing a public meeting. Agreed.

The subjects selected for discussion were:—

- "Post-war Development and its Influence on Freethought."
- "Freethought and Internationalism."
- "The Impact of Freethought on Education."
- "Suggestions for intensified Freethought Propaganda."

Before adjourning for lunch, Mr. Brighton opened the discussion on "Post-war development and its influence on Freethought." His speech was excellent and to the point. Mr. Wishart, Miss Wilenchick, Mr. Shortt, and others, took part. Listeners were in for a good day. At this point the Conference adjourned for lunch.

On the resumption of the meeting it was moved and agreed that Mr. Griffiths should take the chair. The choice could hardly have been a better one. The question for discussion was "Intensified Freethought Propaganda," and it was opened by Mr. Clayton. He wanted to see more platforms and more speakers. He believed in attacking small places rather than big centres. Mr. Farmer threw out several suggestions for the distribution of our literature. The Secretary pointed out that these things had been discussed on the Executive and the matter would be brought forward again.

Mr. Ebury followed with the subject as set, "Freethought and Internationalism." Mr. McCall followed by pressing the claims of Humanitarianism, Mr. Clayton and Mr. Wishart put in claims for an international language.

Time permitted only one more question: "The Impact of Freethought on Education." This was handled by Mr. Corina, and a very lively discussion followed. Want of time prevented the discussion of one item on the Agenda, but there was a fine feeling created by the discussions and good promises for the future.

PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION.

This took place in the larger Holborn Hall. There was a full house and the audience was appreciative and interested to the end. The President opened the proceedings with a very brief introduction, and the quality of the speeches was best shown by the interest and enthusiasm of the listeners. It was also a compliment to the speakers—eight altogether—that the audience showed close interest to the end. Most audiences would have been bored—and other speakers would have deserved it. The proof of the freshness of the audience was shown by the applause which greeted the President when he rose to make the closing speech.

There was a large sale of literature and the new booklet on Thomas Paine was in great demand. Outside, the people were celebrating the approach of peace. Inside the hall everyone was eager for more struggle, firmer contests, a sterner and stronger onslaught on the fundamental enemies of civilisation—ignorance and brutality.

MR. HUXLEY'S NEW NOVEL

ONE anticipates a new novel from Mr. Aldous Huxley rather as one awaited Anatole France's latest in the old days: one expects wit, characterisation and an intellectual background founded in humanistic scepticism. "Time Must Have a Stop"* fulfils the first two expectations. It is, so far as the story is concerned, skilfully and pleasantly told: every character is brought to life in a few deft strokes, while the contrasting scenes of Haverstock Hill and nostalgic pre-war Florence are sketched with the economy of words and detail which is the essence of good description. The plot is unimportant except to its main participants:

* "Time Must Have a Stop," by Aldous Huxley (Chatto and Windus).

Sebastian Barnack, a seventeen-year-old poet, who suffers from what advertisements in the "New Statesman" would call a "prog" father—a prog prig, in short—is refused the evening clothes which would allow him to attend parties and meet delightful girls; this tragedy of adolescence, as indeed it would be, sours him for the first part of the book, in which incidentally we are shown his methods of composing verse in the modern style, which I take to be the best, and indeed only explanation of the modern idiom so far set down in writing. Then his rich Epicurean uncle Eustace invites him to his villa outside Florence, where he meets a horrible old great-aunt and her young widowed companion, who inevitably seduces him in the true Anatole France style. The dress clothes are to be ordered and paid for by Eustace, partly to please the boy, partly to annoy his father. But on the eve of the visit to the tailor Eustace has a stroke and dies. The boy takes a Degas print which his uncle has given him, sells it back to a dealer and orders the suit; the loss of the print is discovered and ascribed to theft; Sebastian is ashamed to own up. The whole business of the dress-clothes—so important to him, so utterly insignificant to everybody else—is admirably told; lives have been ruined, lives have been taken, for less.

But there is another side to the book, which I for one find disturbing. The old great-aunt is a Spiritualist and she immediately summons a medium to be a channel of communication between dead Eustace and his survivors. I regret to say that Mr. Huxley pictures Eustace's spirit floating round his home during the séance, hearing the questions addressed to him through the medium and answering them: the medium muddles his answers, however, to Eustace's annoyance, so that they become as meaningless and stupid as mediumistic communications usually are. In other words, Mr. Huxley appears to accept Spiritualistic phenomena as genuine, but distorted, communication with the dead. This is startling enough but, taken in combination with the long (and, to my taste, wearisome) descriptions of Eustace's sensations after death, suggests a new direction to Mr. Huxley's philosophical outlook. It will not now surprise me very much if Mr. Huxley goes a step or two farther. A few weeks ago I was charmed to read, in an obituary of Steve Donoghue by Freddie Fox, his fellow-jockey, a suggestion that St. Peter at Heaven's gate might now cry "Come on, Steve!" Mr. Huxley's next novel may well contain some such incident. It seems to be the fashion. Only a few months ago Mr. Somerset Maugham's last novel described at great length his hero's spiritual ecstasy which seemed to me to be a blend of indigestion and magnesium flares; Uncle Eustace's post-mortem sensations are very similar. Rome does this sort of thing much better, and it should be fatally easy for either Mr. Maugham or Mr. Huxley to tread that beaten path. "Come on, Aldous!"

C. E. BECHHOFFER ROBERTS.

THE STATE CHURCH

COMMENTING on the reaction against religion in this country one sapient editor ascribes the change to fashionable cynicism. This is pure nonsense. The Royal Family, the aristocracy, most all the folks who fill the big positions, patronise the Christian Religion, and unite in recognising the State Church as a branch of the Civil Service. Whatever snobbish imitation there may be is placed to the credit of religion. In spite of all this fashionable acquiescence, the clergy have to bewail thinly-attended churches. The rector who resigned because he had no audience may have acted from the courage of despair, but if every parson of a half-empty church resigned his position, where would religion be in this country?

The State Church, with its ancient endowments, and its Parliamentary support, is in a more favourable position than its Non-conformist rivals to combat the growing indifference of the nation. But, even so, this wealthy Church has to make itself cheap in all sorts of questionable ways to induce people to attend its services. The irony is that the cheaper this official Church of Christ makes itself, the less the people attend. No Church, however powerful, however wealthy, can put the clock back. This Church is no longer the choice of the English people. Its boasted thirty-nine articles of religion are out of date; its ritual and services are very much out of date; its parsons and curates are antediluvian in their mental outlook. The Church of England marriage service is a perpetual insult to women; the burial service is a standing witness that some folks can console themselves with lies.

Present-day preachers cannot even present the "old, old story" with attractive and plausible emphasis. Everything is flat, stale, and unprofitable. The flood of verbiage from the pulpits is as dull and unpleasant as ditchwater. It is not only turgid, intolerable stuff, but the preachers talk like lawyers presenting a sorry brief, and not with the zeal of the believer. The Church of England is only a society of gentlemen playing at being priests, and England is now a democratic country. That is one reason why they no longer command audiences in the buildings in which they ape the genuflections of the age of Faith.

A man leaving gaol was implored by the chaplain to bear in mind the sermons he had heard and never to return.

"Sir," said the departing man, with real emotion, "no one who has ever heard you preach would ever want to come back here again."

M.

THE TEETOTALLER AND HIS COLD

(Concluded from page 201)

with any, or even with all, frequenters of the tavern. But the gospel of fraternity being breathed into him from many spiritual sources, he imbibed the words of wisdom, and had another, saying that he would now live peacefully for ever in the house of the vendor of rum. And his hand did tremble as with an ague, and his spirit did overflow. But he had another and was comforted. Now, at the tenth hour there arose a voice in the land calling: "Time, gentlemen, please."

And strong men seized him, and bore him to a chariot, and he was driven unto his home.

Then, when they had laid him on his virtuous couch, his eyes were opened and he smiled sweetly on his benefactors. And blessed them as they took their departure. A deep sleep fell upon him.

And behold, when day broke, his cold had vanished—along with his teetotal principles.

* * *

A certain wise man from Aberdeen hearing of these things, spake thus:—

"It were better far had he purchased the rum in a bottle. And conveyed it unto his dwelling, and there partaken of the contents. Thus would he have saved the cost of the taxi-cab hire."

J. EFFEL.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

For many years the number of people who attended church was about twenty-five per cent. Now, according to the Rev. Dr. Soper in addressing an audience at the Albert Hall, Nottingham, on May 16, only seven out of every hundred attend church. Yet the clergy, of all denominations, are crying out for their war-damaged buildings to be repaired at once. Probably they think that if they don't make haste the seven per cent. will shrink to three or four.

OBITUARY

W. J. TURNER.

The death is reported of W. J. Turner, of Bebington, which took place suddenly on May 9. He was a member of the Parent Society N.S.S., a staunch Freethinker. His activities were on a wide scale and he won the esteem of all with whom he came in contact, and many of his associates were present at the funeral which took place at Bebington Cemetery on May 12.

W. A. W.

SARAH ALICE GOURMAND.

We are informed of the death of Sarah Alice Gourmand of Wallasey, which took place on May 8 after a long and distressing illness. A Freethinker for many years, her character and humanitarian outlook and regard for others attracted many friends, who regarded her with real affection. Our sincere sympathy is with her husband, a member of the N.S.S., and family in their great loss. The cremation took place at the Landican Crematorium on May 13 when a Secular Service was read by Mr. A. R. Anderson.

R. H. R.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 3.30 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m., various speakers.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., Dr. J. C. FLUGEL, D.Sc.: "Ourselves and Germany."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Bolton Branch N.S.S. (Town Hall Steps).—Saturday, June 9, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: "Religion in the Post-War World."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway, Bradford).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., a lecture.

Burnley (Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Cornholme (Todmorden Valley).—Wednesday, June 6, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Crawshawbooth (Lancs.).—Friday, June 1, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., debate: Rev. G. LIVINGSTONE and Mr. A. REILLY.

Hapton (Lancs.).—Monday, June 4, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Kingston Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. W. BARKER will lecture.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., Mr. C. McCALL will lecture.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. T. M. MOSLEY will lecture.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Cardiff Branch N.S.S. (Severn Road School).—Friday, June 1, 7.30 p.m., Mr. W. A. ANDOW: "Fetishes in Modern Dress."

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