

THE Freethinker

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Death comes equally to all, and makes all equal when it comes.—JOHN DONNE.

Freethought, Religion, and Death.

In the early months of the War a mortally wounded British soldier was picked up after lying for nearly two days unattended. During that time he had placed himself with the reading of Ruskin's *Crown of Wild Olives*. At his request the book was buried with him. He had, he said, found comfort within its pages ever since he had been in France, and wished to be with him in his last rest. Of another form, not of not so vastly different a kind as might appear at first glance, is the case of the soldier who asks to see a priest in his dying moments, accepts his ministrations with thankfulness, and dies comforted by the consolations of a religion in which he has been brought up. In the one case a volume of lectures by a master of English prose. In the other case a Bible and a priest. The difference appears striking, and yet they both serve to illustrate a single psychological

fact. The Freethinker notes these cases, and his philosophy finds room for both. He knows that the fact of finding comfort and the fact of truth are quite distinct. A delusion may be as consoling as reality, provided it is accepted without question. The first soldier with his *Crown of Wild Olives* does not prove that Ruskin said the last word, or even the best word, on the matters therein dealt with. Neither does the request for a priest prove there is truth in religion. The consolations of religion are the result of the belief in religion. The comfort from a book results from the conviction of the truth of what is written, or a sense of the beauty of the language in which it is written. They are both evidence of the power of belief, and no Freethinker was ever stupid enough to deny that. What comfort would the finest literature ever produced bring to a man who was convinced that religious ministrations were before all things necessary? And what comfort would the most fervent of priests bring to a man without belief in religion? Comfort follows conviction. The question of its truth or social value are quite distinct questions.

Naturally, the clergy of all denominations make the most of such demand as exists for their services. Because these are sought by one, we are asked to believe that they are necessary to all. They forget that the value of a thing is shown not by how people can get on with it, but how they can manage without it. The indispensability of whiskey is not shown by the fact that some people say they cannot do without it. Its dispensability is demonstrated by the fact that others being quite as well in its absence. The drunkard does not confound the sober man. It is the same way, it is not the religious man who presents the Freethinker with a problem. It is the other way about. The Freethinker is not puzzled by the man who demands religious teachings and asserts that he cannot get on without them. It is the religious man who is confounded by the Freethinker getting on quite well without these teachings, living

a useful and upright life, and meeting death with calmness and dignity. Other things equal, one man without religion is of much greater evidential value than five hundred with it. The five hundred prove, at most, that human nature can get on with religion. The one man proves that human nature can get on without it. It removes religion from a necessity to a luxury or a dissipation.

In these days death is one of the most familiar of facts. In many cases it meets us in the death of a relative or friend killed in the full flush of manhood on foreign soil. In all cases it fronts us in the ghastly lists of dead published day by day in the newspapers. It is so common, that we read of the death of a thousand men now with less emotion than we should have read the account of a street accident a little over a year ago. Familiarity has dulled the edge of our sensibilities; a year of war has worked the inevitable consequence of a certain coarsening of our moral fibre. War, with its appeal to the more primitive feelings of mankind, has offered religion a chance of re-establishing itself, and religionists of all kinds have availed themselves of the opportunity.

Thus, a leading article in one of the religious journals says: "The weight of our sorrow is immensely lightened if we can feel sure that one whom we have loved and lost has but ascended to spheres of further development, education, service, achievement, where, by-and-bye, we shall rejoin him." This is a common statement which, by long usage, has become generally accepted. But what evidence is there of its truth? There is none that I know of. It has about as much basis in fact as stories of death-bed conversions, or dying people calling out for religion. Here and there such cases may occur, but the overwhelming majority of people die without giving a thought to religion. So with the comfort that the living are assumed to derive from a belief in the immortality of those whom they have lost. We do not see that the religious father or mother or child feels death less keenly than those who are not religious. The break is felt by all alike. It is not to all a question of religious belief; it is one of sensibility, of affection, of temperament. A child in heaven will not compensate a mother for the loss of a child on earth. Religious folk may repeat certain set formulæ, but watch them when death has delivered its stroke, and see whether it is possible to detect any difference between the attitude of Freethinkers and Christians in the presence of death. Whatever difference there is, I believe to be entirely in favor of the Freethinker. But the sorrow is sharp enough in all cases.

The writer already cited admits:—

"It is indeed quite possible for people who are agnostic or unbelieving with regard to immortality to give themselves wholly to the pursuit of truth and to the service of their fellow men, in moral earnestness and heroic endeavor; they may endure pain and sorrow with calm resignation, and toil on in patience and perseverance. The best of the ancient Stoics did so, and many a modern Agnostic is doing so to-day."

The significance of this admission is in no wise diminished by the accompanying qualification that this class of people "are missing a joy which would have been to them a wellspring of courage and strength." That is pure assumption. Those who are without this particular belief are conscious of no

lack of courage or strength. And on this question they must be taken as the final authority. Certainly their outward conduct affords no room for such a conclusion. Their behavior in the great crises of life is at least as worthy as that of religionists; while it may be safely argued that a serene resignation in the face of death as the termination of individual life, is socially quite as valuable as the hectic emotionalism of cultivated religious belief.

What is there in the fact of natural death that should breed irresolution, rob us of courage, or fill us with fear? Experience proves that there are a hundred and one things for which men, aye, and women, will face almost certain death without fear. At the present moment millions of men are facing death, and no one would seriously claim that their doing so has any intimate relation to religious belief, or that it is in any way dependent upon it. As a racial quality fear of death is a negative quality. Its positive aspect is the will to live, and that may be seen in the lower animals as well as in man. And even as it is, there are many things that man dreads more than death, and to avoid which he will cheerfully challenge extinction. The fear of death is not a powerful factor in life, because existence would be intolerable if it were so. It would rob life of its daring, of its courage, and of its value; the mere operation of Natural Selection has guarded us against this. Fear of death is part of the jargon of the priest; he has taught it to the people because it was to his interest to do so, and the people who use this jargon do so because it is only the minority who possess the capacity or the inclination to analyse their feelings or criticise the language they use.

The fear of death is a religious fear—older than Christianity, true, because religion is older than Christianity. But it was Christianity that gave death its most fearful form, because it made it the beginning of an existence of terror from which few could escape. Christianity did not make men brave in the presence of death—that, again, is a popular superstition. What it did was to clothe a natural fact with supernatural terrors, and then offer a doubtful antidote to counteract the poison it had injected. The comfort is necessary only so long as the belief is present. Remove the belief, and death takes its place as one of the facts of existence, surrounded with all the sadness that properly belongs to a last farewell, but rid of all the doubts and terrors created by religion. The Freethinker, because he is a Freethinker, needs none of these artificial stimulants in the presence of death, and he pays the Christian the compliment of believing that, without his religion, he would also find them unnecessary. It is not the Freethinker who lays claim to superiority; it is the Christian who tries to force that claim upon him. As a Freethinker, I venture to believe that the difference in human nature between the man who believes in religion, and the man who rejects it, is not so profound that what is dispensable with the first is indispensable with the second. If Freethinkers can devote themselves "to the pursuit of truth and the service of their fellow-men, in moral earnestness and heroic endeavor," if they can "endure pain and sorrow with calm resignation, and toil on, in patience and resignation," I see no reason why Christians should not reach the same point of development.

(To be concluded.) C. COHEN.

George Meredith on Immortality.

OF all the great poets George Meredith is, perhaps, the most helpfully didactic and profoundly illuminative. *A Reading of Earth, A Reading of Life, Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth*, and many of his *Sonnets*, shine as incomparable interpretations of the great problems and experiences of life. While he entertains, he also instructs his readers. To him Nature is one and lives, and it is the spirit of life within her that he sets before us in such brilliant colors. The earth and its life constitute the one

subject of his song; and he never considers it from any point of view without throwing some fresh light upon it. Winter, spring, summer, and autumn are phases of earthly manifestation, and each of them is perfect in its way. It is to Nature alone that Meredith addresses all his prayers. In the *Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn*, for example, we read thus:—

"Great Mother Nature! teach me, like thee,
To kiss the season and shun regrets.
And am I more than the mother who bore?
Mock me not with thy harmony!
Teach me to blot regrets,
Great Mother! me inspire
With faith that forward sets
But feeds the living fire,
Faith that never frets
For vagueness in the form.
In life, O keep me warm!
For what is human grief?
And what do men desire?
Teach me to feel myself the tree
And not the withered leaf."

Man, being Nature's "chief expression, her great word of life," must be looked upon as a purely natural being, all the episodes in whose life occur, not only within the sphere of Nature, but also under the causal spell of her forces. His birth and death are simply evolutionary events, for which Nature alone is responsible. According to theology, birth signifies the descent into matter of an immaterial entity called spirit, and death the release of that spirit from its incarceration in flesh and its return to the supernatural realm out of which it came.

Death is the end, as birth marks the beginning, of individual life, and the interval between the two belongs exclusively to the earth. This is beautifully expressed in *The Woods of Westermain*:—

"Earth your haven, Earth your helm,
You command a double realm;
Laboring here to pay your debt,
Till your little sun shall set;
Leaving her the future task;
Loving her too much to ask."

Professor Moffatt, while convinced that Meredith is positive upon prayer, admits that "upon the other phase of religious belief which pre-occupies his pen, he is curiously negative. When he passes on to the problem of immortality, his attitude becomes one of repression and of warning; his speech, when it is not limping and hesitating, traverses the gamut of dissuasion." His attitude is indeed one of warning, but never of repression, nor is his language ever "limping and hesitating." In *The Question Whither* we read thus:—

"When we have thrown off this old suit,
So much in need of mending,
To sink among the naked mute,
Is that, think you, our ending?
We follow many, more we lead,
And you who sadly turf us,
Believe not that all living seed
Must flower above the surface."

To Meredith life and death are one, both being aspects or phases of Nature, and this is how he sings of them in the lovely *Hymn to Color*:—

"Love took my hand when hidden stood the sun
To fling his robe on shoulder-heights of snow.
Then said: There lie they, Life and Death in one,
Whichever is, the other is; but know
It is thy craving self that thou dost see,
Not in them seeing me."

What is death, then? In the *Westminster Gazette* for February 9, 1905, the poet thus wrote:—

"As to death, anyone who understands Nature at all thinks nothing of it. Her whole concern is perpetually to produce nourishment for all her offspring. We men that others may come—and better, if we rear them in the right way. In talking of these deep things men too often make the error of imagining that the world was made for themselves."

There is nothing "limping and hesitating" in *The Dirge in Woods*:—

"A wind sways the pines,
And below
Not a breath of wild air;
Still as the mosses that glow
On the flooring and over the lines
Of the roots here and there."

The pine-tree drops its dead;
They are quiet as under the sea.
Overhead, overhead
Rushes life in a race,
As the clouds the clouds chase;
And we go,
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,
Even wa,
Even so."

Many maintain that deep down in every human heart there is an instinctive longing for life after death. Meredith dubs that longing "lust," and in *The Woods* draws a fundamental distinction between it and a healthy love of life thus:—

"For the sake of life,
For that life is dear,
The lust after life
Clings to it fast.
For the sake of life,
For that life is fair,
The lover of life
Flings it broadcast.

The lover of life knows his labor divine,
And therein is at peace.
The lust after life craves a touch and a sign
That the life shall increase.
The lust after life in the chills of its lust
Claims a passport of death.
The lover of life sees the flame in our dust
And a gift in our breath."

In Meredith's poetry, the notion that death ends all for the individual is not allowed to associate itself with pessimistic forebodings, or to act as a depressing influence upon life. Nature, he holds, has a heart of mirth, in which we are called upon to live. He is a firm believer in the joy of life, not as a distant ideal, but as a glad experience within the reach of all true and honest folk. To dread death, to sigh and moan at the thought of the final passing is to be disloyal to Nature. Human grief is a form of cowardice in the presence of Mother Earth. Why should we be sad and heavy-hearted in contemplation of the end? We ought to be fixed, and calmly "await the dusk to-be." It is inconceivable that lovers of Nature should fear dissolution which must inevitably follow evolution. So the poet breaks out thus:—

"And O, green bounteous Earth!
Bacchante Mother! stern to those
Who live not in thy heart of mirth;
Death, shall I shrink from loving thee?
Into the breast that gives the rose
Shall I with shuddering fall?"

Professor Moffatt asserts that Meredith stands alone among the poets of all the ages in his refusal to admit any "touch of grief, or pang of sentimental melancholy, at human transience"; but the assertion is false. Lucretius condemns, in scathing terms, the "vain imaginary grief" to which so many are victims as they contemplate their decease. He calls them "idiots," cherishers of vain delusions, and veritable cowards:—

"To whom the worst
Of death is want of drink and endless thirst."

Addressing himself to one of these cowards, Lucretius asks, "What has bugbear death to frighten man"? Why should you be afraid of it?—

"The worst that can befall thee, measured right,
Is a sound slumber, and a long good night."

In personal immortality Meredith has absolutely no faith, but he teaches with unwavering fidelity that we live not unto ourselves, but unto the race to which we belong. While we live we are setting powerful waves of influence, which shall continue to agitate the sea of social life to the end of time:—

"Our life is but a little holding, lent
To do a mighty labor; we are one
With heaven and the stars when it is spent
To serve God's aim; else we die with the sun."

The good man ceases to be, but his life is destined to go down the ages as a factor in the moulding of generations yet unborn. For him who is "an ancient egg," or "a tough bird," having "a rudderless tongue, burning dead trifles, like the cock of dung," Nature has no admiration, but in *The State of Age* we are told

whom she does love and honor:—

"But hast thou in thy season set her fires
To burn from Self to Spirit through the lash,
Honored the sons of Earth shall hold thee high;
Yes, to spread light when thy proud letter I
Drops prone and void as any thoughtless dash."

There are people, alas, who have such a selfish lust for life that they cannot tolerate the idea of the cessation of personality. They have formed such an exalted estimate of their own value to the universe that they are powerless to conceive of the possibility of their individuality being ever blotted out. But in Nature's eye personality possesses no significance whatever, and is the object of no special treatment. It is in our own estimation alone that we are of such value to the universe that she cannot afford to lose us. Meredith laughs our sense of self-importance to scorn, and deals it a fatal blow when he declares that Nature shows no partiality whatever for individuals, her sole concern being for the race:—

"Not thee
She cares for, but us. Follow her.
Follow her, and thou wilt not sink."

We should look at ourselves through Nature's eyes, and learn to regard ourselves as being of value only in so far as we live for the welfare of the race. In *The Empty Purse* the poet preaches a powerful sermon to our later Prodigal Son, with the application of which this article may well close:—

"Thou under stress of the strife
Shalt hear for sustainment supreme
The cry of the conscience of Life;
Keep the young generations in hail,
And bequeath them no tumbled house."

J. T. LLOYD.

The Challenge of Christianity.

There is usually much good sense in the weekly magazine, the *Outlook*, published in New York; and those who like to know Theodore Roosevelt's vigorous and breezy views on the European War, and Mexico, and American politics, should consult its pages. But one of the July issues was disfigured by an absurd article, unsigned, which claimed that the tragedy of the War would drive men back to faith and Christ. Indeed, said the peculiar person who wrote it, so far from the value of Christianity being thrown into question by the War, "it is Christianity which is challenging rather than being challenged." And he wound up his seventeenth century foolishness with the remark:—

"There never has been but one Savior of the world, and against the blackness of the darkness to-day he stands, the hope and light of the world."

What on earth is the use of a Savior who, after centuries of effort, can do nothing but stand "against the blackness of the darkness" of the very world which he is supposed to redeem and reform? It is as if a borough surveyor and sanitary engineer, whose business it is to keep the sewers in order, should solemnly say to his town council: "Gentlemen, the drainage of this borough is in a most horrible condition, and I beg to report that I am as much disgusted with the stench as I was last year."

Some Labor member of the Council would probably get up and propose that advertisements be inserted in the journals for a new borough surveyor.

You will observe the petty insolence of this *Outlook* prophet. You and I and the rest of us, in the five continents, are the world which lies in "the blackness of darkness," and all our light and hope emanates from the Savior, and "there never has been but one." This announcement is made, in the first instance, to the American public. I have spent nine months in the States, and can testify that our republican friends over the water are quite competent to state their own case. But the *Outlook* is a very able and useful periodical which has a vogue even in Great Britain; and, since it chooses to print this libel on the human race, a column of British protest may not appear altogether unnatural.

The reader who imagines my protest will take the form of a rummaging in historical records in order to prove the failure of Christianity, is quite mistaken. In its time and place, let us say from the fifth century to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this creed and system fulfilled a human need, and produced great figures like Benedict, Alfred, Dante, Pascal, Fox, and Bunyan. The genius of Voltaire perceived, in the eighteenth century, the impending collapse, and the collapse is proceeding. Christianity is now unable to cope with social demands, just as the old Greek and Roman polities, with all their wisdom, would fail to control modern Europe. We cannot now submit to the methods of Pericles, or Cæsar, or Christ, or Hildebrand.

Not to speak of the Germanic Powers, let us take the religious position of our Allies and our Empire. In Belgium, in Italy, in France, in Russia, in Japan, one can easily find very considerable numbers of people who are not in the least likely to adopt "the one Savior of the world" as their guide, philosopher, and friend in politics, economics, and ideals. There are many such persons in the British Empire; and we must also bear in mind that vast masses of Buddhists, Hindus, and Moslems (the latter in Africa as well as India) who are practically involved in the fate of the Empire, and who are confronting the crisis of the War and the crises that will arise after it, will assuredly not go to Nazareth for advice. It would, for example, mean political and administrative suicide for the British Government to recommend Christ to the population of India in these terms:—

"There never has been but one Savior of the world, and against the blackness of the darkness to-day he stands, the hope and light of the world."

The *Outlook* writer commits an impertinence against the nations. True indeed it is, that the wisdom of the nations has failed to avert this lamentable War; and if anybody were to affirm that our European diplomacy had been as inefficient as Christianity itself, I should agree. But our impertinent mentor tells us all that we are powerless to escape from the confusion and tragedy without Christ. The whole lot of us, including Germany and Turkey, Great Britain and France, are absolutely hopeless and helpless! Some of us have believed that, in all the belligerent nations, there are groups of sane people, who are both good citizens and good students of affairs, and whose collective judgment will evolve, and is even now beginning to evolve, adequate answers to the questions propounded by the War. This judgment will be applied to the problems of nationality, and mutual relationship of countries, with the many racial, political, and economic factors with which these problems are associated. As types of this faculty for estimating such issues, let me name Vanderveld of Belgium, Sir Robert Borden of Canada, and our Viscount Bryce. The communities now at war possess many such judicious and public-spirited members, and it is upon their insight and sense, sympathetically supported by the general citizenship, that our destinies practically depend. All such men would readily admit that mere negotiation, mere procedure of arbitration tribunals, mere political ingenuity, and mere knowledge of history and precedents, will not assist Europe apart from the noble ideal of international fraternity. That is understood. But only a benevolent fool will try to make out that the doctrine of fraternity, minus brains, will solve the difficulties revealed by the conflict of 1914-15. The love of humanity is the essential motive of true civilisation; but, as Comte has said, "love desires light in order to attain its ends"; that is, it needs knowledge, ideas, and criticism. This sound intellectual method, acting in the interest of human brotherhood, can only have value when it is developed by the nations themselves. To suggest to the nations that both the motive and the method can only come from an external Savior ("and there never has been but one") is to accuse the nations of being crippled, blind, deaf; that is to say, of general imbecility. In fact, the march of civilisation

is not accurately described as a being "saved." Humanity learns from age to age. This education of the human race is an evolution, not a salvation. To save a man implies some drastic operation such as seizing hold of the person drowning, and forcibly dragging him from peril. That is not a rational representation of the progress of mankind. The progress is a growth, a natural expansion of powers and of vision; a "creative evolution," as Bergson expresses it; but, in any case, the movement is from within the heart and nature of humanity itself.

In due time, the delegates of the nations of the earth will sit at the round table, and goodwill, experience, sagacity, and genius will hold conference, and devise the means of enduring peace. But the profane and vulgar theology of the *Outlook* will not be invited to assist. We can fancy the scene if a professor of that theology managed to penetrate to the council-chamber.

"Who are you, sir?" asks the President.

"The *Outlook* man."

"What is your business?"

"I come to proclaim the only possible solution of your difficulties."

"Proclaim it, but be brief."

"There never has been but one Savior of the world, and against the blackness of the darkness to-day he stands, the hope and light of the world."

"Many thanks; but you are probably not aware that civilisation has decisively rejected the proposed solution. The attendant will show you the way out."

F. J. GOULD.

The Poet of the People.

"That same gentle spirit from whose pen
Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow."
—SPENCER.

"Not a fantastical fool of them shall flout me out of my
calling."—SHAKESPEARE.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW fills an entirely honorable place in the literary world. There has been in every age a class of popular literature which, falling short of high distinction, has respectable qualities of its own which attract the attention and esteem of readers whose interests would be confused and puzzled by work of more distinction. The centenary of Longfellow, which was celebrated some years since, proved that the popularity of his poetry has survived the assaults of critics. He is essentially the poet of ordinary folk. His vogue is indisputable, and he deserves to be remembered for having induced many to read verse who would otherwise have been denied a refined and pleasant entertainment. Popular taste has improved considerably during the course of half a century. The popular poet of the last generation was Martin Tupper, and no one who sets "Hiawatha" over against the "Proverbial Philosophy" can fail to acknowledge that we have advanced a good way along the path of culture since our fathers found poetry in the Tupperian muse. "Hiawatha," and even "The Village Blacksmith," are great advances, technically and imaginatively, upon these sententious platitudes and flaccid versification.

Still, it is impossible to pretend that Longfellow's poetry is anything more than a stepping-stone by which the intelligent reader may, with good fortune, be led on to an appreciation of the more permanent literature that lies beyond. Longfellow is relaxed, careful, irreproachable in taste; but he is lacking entirely in individuality. He belongs to that class of American writers which played the sedulous ape to European authors. Compared with the really original American poets, Longfellow must suffer. He had nothing of Walt Whitman's depth of feeling or width of outlook. The ether which Emerson inhaled upon the peaks of thought was too rare for Longfellow. He did not share the keenness of Poe's artistic sensibility. Much of Longfellow's work is merely a musical echo of European poets; but if he

were a disciple, it must be added that, within modest limits, he was an artist. Even his worst poems are pleasant and tuneful numbers, touched with fancy, and seldom falling below a certain careful level of workmanship. He had a happy knack in selecting uncommon aspects of common themes. Occasionally, in a few of his ballads and in "Evangeline" and "Hiawatha" he laid hold of exceptional subjects and succeeded admirably.

Longfellow's "Building of the Ship" is a joy to all patriotic Americans, and its recital has roused multitudes to the white heat of enthusiasm. It is as effective as anything Longfellow ever wrote, but its conclusion is not poetry at all. It is a fine piece of impassioned rhetoric. Listen!—

"Thou, too, sail on, O ship of State!
Sail on, O Union, strong and great!
Humanity, with all its fears,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!"

This reads like one of Ingersoll's brilliant perorations. You can almost see the outstretched arm and hear the resonant voice. The effect is prodigious. "Give me liberty or give me death!" that is the kind of thing, a sonorous and passionate appeal flung out over the air to thrill the hearts of thousands.

Longfellow did not reign by artistry alone. How should he, seeing that the ordinary ear is no more apprehensive of the artistic quality in poetry than the average eye is alive to the artistic element of paint? It is precisely in virtue of a certain plainness of sentiment and popularity of ideal that he was able to hold his place as pre-eminently the most widely read poet of his time. His very excesses attracted multitudes of admirers. His prodigality in the use of similes is at once his weakness and his strength. It tends to cloy with too much sweetness. Longfellow not only shows the lily trembling like a bridal veil, and the wild flower on its spray shaking to the music of the waterfall; he tumbles the roses upon the reader, until like the guests of the Emperor Heliogabalus, he is in danger of being smothered.

Scholar as well as poet, Longfellow exerted a wider influence on literature than is commonly recognised. In his *Poets and Poetry of Europe* he aroused interest in Continental writers. His translation of the *Divine Comedy* did much to restore the study of Dante and his contemporaries. Longfellow's prose works *Outre Mer* and *Hyperion* are, however, commonplace in tone and feeble in execution, and bear more testimony to his industry than his originality. His dramatic efforts, *The Golden Legend* and *The Spanish Student*, are neither plays nor poems. They are like Cathedral windows, their panes cramped together with heavy lines of lead, whereas his poems are cast as a single jet.

Longfellow is, as we have said, the most popular of poets. All over the English-speaking world his poems are household words. In England and Australia and New Zealand, no less than in America, he counts his admirers by hundreds of thousands. The fact needs emphasising, for the fashion among critics is to patronise, with considerable condescension, Longfellow's efforts. That the popularity of his work is widespread has been attested. Its endurance is fairly proved by many years' trial. His poetry is the mirror of the man. Here you have his genial, kindly nature, his sunny temperament, his sentimental Unitarianism, his refined and cultured mind. Sincerity and sweetness are his leading notes. What he lacks are fire and strength. Longfellow is not necessarily a great poet, but he is incontestably a poet, and the most popular singer of his century.

"What good is like to this—
To do worthy the writing, and to write
Worthy the reading and the world's delight?"

MIMNERMUS.

Literary Paris is aghast at the news that Germain Nouveau, a poet and a close friend of Paul Verlaine, is reduced to begging for a living. Had the poet been a parson, he might have begged all his life without comment.

The Fourth Gospel.

"NEITHER DO I CONDEMN THEE."

IN John viii. 1—11 is related a story of a woman "taken in adultery," which commences:—

"And early in the morning Jesus came again into the temple, and the people came unto him; and he sat down and taught them."

The writer of this story seems to have thought that any self-constituted prophet who appeared in Palestine had the right to go into the temple and expound to the people any new doctrines he had excogitated. He had no such right. Neither would the Jewish authorities have permitted such a thing: not being able to stone him then and there, they would have called the Roman guard, stationed close by, and had the innovator arrested. According to the story, however, the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman, "and having set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman hath been taken in adultery, in the very act. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such: what then sayest thou of her?" It was upon this occasion that mention is made of Jesus being able to write. Twice, it is stated, "he stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground." He is also represented as saying "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." This judgment, though humane, and in some cases just, might, if adopted in criminal proceedings, prevent the punishment of almost any offender. It would not, however, have produced the result stated in the story. The scribes and Pharisees would not have slunk away "one by one" until only Jesus and the woman were left: they would have waited to see and hear the end of the farce without budging an inch. They would also have something to say to the statement Jesus addressed to the woman—"Neither do I condemn thee: go thy way; from henceforth sin no more."

In the Revised Version this narrative is placed within brackets, and is spaced as not properly belonging to the Gospel of John: also, in the margin is a note saying that "Most of the ancient authorities omit John vii. 53—viii. 11. Those which contain it vary much from each other." This statement is no doubt correct; for the narrative is not found in the two oldest MSS.—the *Codex Sinaiticus* and the *Codex Vaticanus*—and the next MS. in point of age, the *Codex Alexandrinus*, is imperfect, the leaves between John vi. 50 and viii. 52 being missing.

Where did the Presbyter John find this story? Well, Eusebius, when commenting upon the contents of a book written by the Presbyter's friend Papias, says: "He also relates the story of a woman accused of many sins before the Lord [i.e., Jesus] which is also contained in the Gospel according to the Hebrews" (Ecol. Hist. iii. 39). It would seem, then, that the pseudo-John took the narrative recorded in the Hebrew Gospel, and, after striking out all the "many sins" save adultery, remodelled it as he did the Miracle of the Loaves, and presented it to his readers in a totally new dress. This is the most probable source.

WRANGLING AND QUIBBLING.

In chapters vii. and viii. of the Fourth Gospel the so-called "teaching" of the pseudo-Jesus is of so ridiculous a character that it almost passes understanding how Christians with a grain of sense can regard such an individual as their Lord and Savior. I should have passed over all the wretched galimatias in these chapters but for the fact that the Jesus of the Synoptics never gave utterance to such nonsense. To emphasise the fact that we have in this Gospel an entirely new Jesus, I select three or four extracts as examples. Had this Savior been called by another name—say, Jeremiah or Berachiah—no one could have any doubt of the fact; but the name "Jesus" carries with it, by association of ideas, something of the Jesus of the other three Gospels.

John vii. 37—39.—"On the last day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let

him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this he spake of the spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive."

This silly speech is on a par with that made to the woman of Samaria, to whom the same Savior promised to give "living water"—and he allowed the woman to go away without telling her what he meant. He does precisely the same here. The writer of the Gospel, it is true, says (for the benefit of his readers) that "he spake of the spirit"; but the pseudo-Jesus made no such explanation. Instead of giving instruction to his hearers, he tried only to mystify them. His statement that "the scripture hath said" the ridiculous words which he here pretends to quote is a deliberate falsehood: there is no such passage in the Old Testament, whether referring to water or spirit, which is anything at all like what this Savior has asserted. This is evidently one of the vulgar ideas of the pseudo-John himself.

John viii. 12—19.—"Again Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. The Pharisees said unto him, Thou bearest witness of thyself; thy witness is not true. Jesus answered and said, Even if I bear witness of myself, my witness is true.....Yea and in your law it is written, that the witness of two men is true. I am he that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me. They said therefore unto him, Where is thy father? Jesus answered, Ye know neither me, nor my Father: if ye knew me, ye would know my Father also."

Here we have a sample of the reasoning employed in the time of the Presbyterian John, as well as the writer's recklessness in making his imaginary Jesus publicly proclaim himself "the light of the world." The reference to the law of Moses respecting witnesses is the following:—

Deut. xix. 15.—"One witness shall not rise up against a man for any sin.....at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall a matter be established."

Jesus, then, in his claim to be "the light of the world" had no witnesses at all. In his rustic simplicity he contended that he himself was one witness, and "the Father" in heaven was the other, thus making the two witnesses required. He did not know that, as an accused person, he could not bear witness to himself; neither did he seem to know that "the Father," to be a witness, would have to come down and show himself, and would be called upon to state what he knew respecting the self-styled "Son." When asked where his father was, the answer of Jesus was evasive. His statement "If ye knew me, ye would know my Father also" was untrue: for if the Jews knew perfectly well who Jesus was, whether a divine Being or a religious pretender, they would know no more about "the Father" than they did before. And it is this ignorant and quibbling Savior that we are asked to believe was, and still is, "the light of the world." It is also this Savior who is reported to have said: "If I told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (iii. 12). His assertion with regard to having two witnesses was, no doubt, one of the "earthly things" which the Jews of his day did not believe: of "heavenly things" this Savior has told us nothing.

John viii. 21—27.—"Jesus said unto them again, I go away, and ye shall seek me: whither I go, ye cannot come. The Jews therefore said, Will he kill himself, that he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come? Jesus said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.....Except ye believe that I am [he], ye shall die in your sins. They said therefore unto him, Who art thou? Jesus said unto them, Even that which I have spoken unto you from the beginning.....He that hath sent me is true; and the things which I heard from him, these speak I unto the world."

The silly utterances of this egotistical Savior are almost nauseating. The educated scribes and Pharisees were "from beneath" and "of this world,"

while the untruthful and quibbling new religionist was "from above" and of heavenly origin. If the cultured Pharisees did not believe that the wrangling preacher was the Savior of the world, they should "die in their sins." When this Savior was asked who he was, he evaded the question, and commenced talking about God being true, and of his speaking "the things" he had heard that deity say. That a divine Savior could utter such nonsense no one save an unthinking Christian of very limited intelligence could possibly believe.

John viii. 41—58.—"The Jews said unto him, We have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them..... I came forth and have come from God.....Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning.....he is a liar, and the father thereof. But because I say the truth, ye believe me not.....The Jews said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a demon? Jesus answered, I have not a demon.....Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my word, he shall never see death. The Jews said unto him, Now we know that thou hast a demon.....Art thou greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? Whom maketh thou thyself? Jesus answered.....Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.....Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was born, I am."

Here the Christian Savior appears to be scarcely sane. He "came forth," he said, from God, and those who kept his word should never see death: but the Jews were children of the Devil, whose practices they followed, and they refused to believe what he said, because he spoke the truth. Then he begins to slander the Devil, who, he says, was a liar and a murderer from the beginning; that is to say, it was not Cain who slew his brother: the murderer was the Devil. When the Jews told lies, they were prompted by the Devil: when he uttered falsehoods himself—as, for instance, in telling his brothers that he had no intention of going to a certain feast at Jerusalem, or in saying that Moses wrote of him, or in slandering the Devil—such untruths did not count, because he had "come from God." When, again, he said that the ancient patriarch, Abraham, knew that he should one day come as the Savior of the world, and rejoiced in that knowledge, this tarradiddle was not a gratuitous falsehood: it was one of the "things" which he had "heard from God."

As to the last statement in the foregoing passage, this ridiculous Savior did not actually say that he existed before the days of Abraham, but he implied that this was so. The writer of the Gospel, however, plainly asserts that such was actually the case. He says:—

"In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.....And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John i. 1, 14).

We see, then, from the foregoing, that we have in the utterances of this imaginary Jesus nothing more nor less than the absurd ideas of the fraudulent Presbyterian John himself. Christians who repose faith in the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel are quite as irrational as those that give credit to the imaginary "Angelic Guard at Mons." And, as regards the latter subject, some of the letters which have appeared in the daily press furnish striking evidence of the enormous amount of credulity still existing among educated Christians with regard to angels and so-called Bible prophecy. There is evidently more work yet to be done by Freethought than, at this time of day, I had any idea of. **ABRACADABRA.**

A good story is told of a bishop's coachman who drank not wisely but too well. He was given the alternative of being dismissed or signing the pledge, but was soon after discovered in a bibulous condition. "I thought you were a Christian man," said his employer severely. "So I am," replied the culprit, "but I ain't a bigoted one."

"Church Notes. War and Christianity," were headlines in the Standard. Not musical notes, either!

Acid Drops.

Some of the religious papers seem bent on circulating the myth that the late Mr. Bowman left his children penniless in order to endow the Secular Society, Limited. We have already pointed out that Mr. Bowman left no children, and that his widow was handsomely provided for, but when some religious journals find it to their interest to circulate falsehoods, nothing seems able to stop them. The *Universer*, a Catholic organ, informs its readers that "the testator positively disinherited his own issue and willed in favor of a Secular Society," and asks, "What can we say of a judge-made law which permits that injustice so that Atheism may profit thereby?"

The first thing to say about it is that it is not true. And what we have already said. The second thing is that, as a matter of fact, it is judge-made law under which Atheists have been persecuted; for the Common Law is little else, and there have been no prosecutions for blasphemy under Statute Law. And judges that have had the courage to restate the law so as to place opinion outside the reach of persecution, will merit the thanks of honest men, even though they may forfeit the affection of the editor of the *Universer*. And, finally, one would have thought that bearing in mind the huge sums of money that have been left to the Churches, quite regardless of the claims of children and relatives, common decency would have prevented religious journals using this plea as a reason for objecting to the ruling of the Court of Appeal.

Suppose Mr. Bowman had been a bachelor, without a single relative in the world. Would the *Universer* have objected to the decision less strenuously? Everyone knows that this would not have made the slightest difference. It is not the interests of the mythical "issue" of Mr. Bowman about which the *Universer* is concerned, but the maintenance of laws against the propagation of a particular opinion. It is a case of baffled bigotry using any means—honest or dishonest—in order to ventilate its chagrin.

That war is a blessing in disguise is a pleasant theory put forth by a London parson. All that is needed is to supplement the pious panegyric with the hope that the War may last thirty years.

Harvest Festivals are now in full swing, and the hard-working and underpaid organists are busy providing the necessary music. A tale is told that at a wedding at this time of the year the worried organist played the well-known hymn, "O What will the Harvest be?"

Our esteemed contemporary, *John Bull*, makes some caustic remarks concerning the charge of sixpence made for admission to Trinity Church, Stratford-on-Avon, where Shakespeare was buried. The paragraph is headed "An insult to Shakespeare." Holy Mother Church is always paying or preying.

A considerable outcry has been raised in the press concerning the illegal use of military titles and badges. Will this apply to the officers of the Church and Salvation Armies?

It is customary with most ministers of religion to represent Freethinkers, or at least those amongst them who are honest, as sadly regretting their inability to believe. "This war," they say, "is our day of visitation, and if it has helped us to realise the truth of Christianity, then it will not have been in vain." According to them, what each one of us ought to be able to say is, "I am not my own. I am bequeathed to the world with a price, the price of his precious blood, and I am bound to pay it for ever belong to Jesus Christ." How the war is calculated to help anybody make such a humiliating confession is beyond our comprehension. We are acquainted with several people whom the War has robbed of their Christian faith. Despite Dr. Horton's wild assertion to the contrary, there are numerous Atheists in the Trenches, some of whom have been there for a year; and the only effect the war has had upon them is their confirmation in unbelief. Some clergymen have been honest enough to admit that, during the last terrible year, multitudes have ceased to walk with Jesus, because they have lost faith in his saving and ruling power.

Now, the Vicar of St. Matthew's, Westminster, assures us that the Christian faith is so beautiful, and the experience of it so precious, that unbelievers are compelled to exclaim,

"Ah, yes, that is very beautiful, and I would give anything in the world if only I could believe it. If I could accept that, O what a different place the world would be for me!" Freethinkers read that and smile, at once pitying the ignorance and despising the prejudice of which he who can talk such sheer nonsense must be the victim. As a matter of fact, Freethinkers glory in their unbelief. Most of their happiness consists in the consciousness that they are no longer the slaves of superstition. The world is so different to them now from what it used to be.

Providence, we are told, does all things well. At a conference at Cambridge on tuberculosis, it was stated that 60,000 persons died in this country each year from consumption. "His tender mercy is over all his works."

Christians are sometimes like the Heathen Chinese, and are "childlike and bland." Mr. Charles Phillips, F.R.G.S., speaking at Godalming Baptist Church, said, "God might send a four days' fog over the German Armies and put the War to a standstill." If the Austrians and the Turks had a place in the sun, the War would still continue.

According to that pious periodical, the *Christian*, two Freethinkers have "rated" since the War. "One of them had to admit that his proclamation of the all-sufficing of science and culture had received its death-blow by the action of that Germany which gloried in being the home of culture without God. And another frankly wrote that the public now turned with disgust from the Gospel of Freethought." We should like to know the names and addresses of these backsliders.

The Rev. S. W. Hughes, successor-elect to Dr. Clifford, in answering the question, "What is happening at this time?" says:—

"I suggest to you confidently that the new spirit of the new age is only to be accounted for in the revaluation of individual life. Men, predisposed to hate war, have given themselves to battle, and the one prevailing motive is the worth of the individual soul."

We as confidently affirm that the reverend gentleman is fundamentally mistaken. He is in total error as to "the new spirit of the new age," which is to be accounted for in the revaluation, not of individual, but of social life. The individual has no worth at all except as a servant of the community. Surely, the prevailing motive of those who fight our battles is not "the worth of the individual soul," which they willingly sacrifice, but love of their country, of freedom, and hatred of military despotism. We admit that, in the Christian system, the ego is all-important, and to secure its safety and comfort becomes the dominating motive; but, at present, the individual counts for nothing except as an asset in the bloody game of war. In society generally, also, the trend of the times is towards altruism as against the selfish egoism of the past.

Mr. Bernard Shaw's use of strong language is being imitated, and Mr. Rudyard Kipling has introduced it in a short story, *Mary Postgates*. The heroine, finding a badly-injured German airman near her home, leaves the man to die. Her parting blessing is to call the dying man "You b—y Pagan." We hope that this is not Mr. Kipling's idea of a perfect Christian lady.

In more senses than one there is only one religion in the world. The beliefs are fundamentally identical, the arguments used in its behalf are the same, and the charges against opponents have an unmistakable family likeness. Thus, Archbishop Carr, of Melbourne, in opening a church school, told his hearers, "Godless education is responsible for the present War." We do not know whether Archbishop Carr is girding at France or not, for that is the only country at war in which "Godless," or Secular Education, obtains in the national schools. Germany, Russia, Austria, England, Italy, and Belgium have all religious education in some form or other in their State schools. Godly education may have acted as a cause of the War. Godless education has not had a chance to so operate. Archbishop Carr is also sure that God intends to humble us, and when our sufferings have wiped out our errors, "and the Almighty is satisfied, then will the War end." We should have thought that the horror and brutality of the present War would have been enough to satiate even Archbishop Carr's Almighty Kaiser.

Mr. John Galsworthy has published a new book, *The Little Man, and Other Stories*. In one of the sketches he makes Man stand up to the Recording Angel, and among the biting

things said is: "Something human is more precious than all the judgments of the sky."

The Rev. J. H. Jowett says that he has "never found an Agnostic whose mind was really at rest." The difficulty that Freethinkers have is finding Christians who are awake.

The newspapers inform us that an Army Chaplain, when holding a service at the Front, invited the congregation to smoke while he preached. How different to the parsons at home, who tell the congregations that they will smoke in the next world.

The *Daily Mirror* says that the Belgians have a cutting reply to the Germans motto "God with us." This assumes the form of a button with the inscription, "Neither God nor Master." We shall be hearing next that the Belgians are Atheists.

"The past is dead—it died on August 4, 1914," writes a flamboyant lady journalist in the columns of a contemporary. This is almost as definite as some clerical predictions of "the end of the world."

The centenary of the wearing of trousers falls this year. They were worn before 1815, but not tolerated "in the best circles." In the olden time, monarchs were careless as to dress, and King David, it is said, danced before the ark, with little on his person beyond a smile. Even the "King of Kings," according to the artists, favored the wearing of a blue blanket.

The work of the Salvation Army among the troops is developing daily, and the "Gospel" soldiers are now risking their lives at Amesbury, Tidworth, and Shorncliffe. The Army's "facilities for buying food cheaply are much appreciated," says "Colonel" Wilson. This looks as if the Salvation Army is dealing in other articles than "Blood" and "Fire."

The *Westminster Gazette*, a highly respectable newspaper, informs its readers that "there are at least 100,000 German hymns; 10,000 have passed into German hymn-books, and about 1,000 are regarded as classics by the German critics." Yet the dear clergy will have it that the Germans are Atheists.

The Pope claims to be infallible, but he has little sense of humor. He has been congratulating the Swiss people on their wisdom in keeping out of the War, and this happy position he attributes to "Divine Providence." Certainly the geographical position of Switzerland prevents a large expenditure on the Swiss Navy.

To speak of the Church as "a human society" is, in the estimation of the *Church Times*, a mortal offence, for which there is no forgiveness, except on thoroughgoing repentance. All we know is that, whatever the Church, in its nature, may be claimed to be, in its history it has always been the most human of all institutions. Those who believe it to be of Divine origin and power, only stultify themselves and hopelessly damn the character of their God.

Mr. G. F. Hazlewood, of Birkenhead, deserves to be congratulated. He has secured a sworn testimony to the Angelic Vision at Mons. Private Cleaver, of the 1st Cheshire Regiment, declares on oath that "I personally was at Mons, and saw the vision of Angels with my own eyes." Mr. Hazlewood says it would be worth travelling all round the world to get a deposition of this kind, and asks other soldiers to endorse it. Mr. Hazlewood also states that Cleaver had frequently spoken to his friends in the canteen of what he had seen at Mons, and that fact, as a correspondent suggests, may have more in it than meets the eye.

Meanwhile, we venture to suggest that if anyone cares to swear that he saw angels at Mons, or Birkenhead, or anywhere else, he would be quite safe from anything in the shape of prosecution or punishment. It would be very hard to prove he didn't see them, although he might not be able to prove that he did. In the next place, one witness is not very convincing. The angels were not a subjective experience, but objective facts. The story runs that the German soldiers saw them, the horses saw them, and refused to advance. They were, thus, palpable facts, and all who were there ought to have seen them. And it is certain that all did not see them. Next, one would like to know when and at what date Cleaver first spoke about the angels in the

canteen, or elsewhere? We venture to predict that it was after Mr. Machen invented the story, and even after the story appeared in the religious papers. Mr. Hazelwood is either very simple or trusts that the public is.

Private Cleaver, in answer to Mr. Hazelwood's question as to whether the Angels were mounted or winged, replied that he could not say. "It appeared as a flash! All in a flash! And he knew they were angels!" As Dominie Sampson would say, Prodigious!

When the War is over we can foresee a new occupation. Returned soldiers who are inclined to go on tour as evangelists may find it a paying game to discover that they belong to the original few who saw the angels at Mons. And why Mons alone? There is still time for them to be seen at other places. There are plenty of angels—and fools are anything but scarce.

The Bishop of Ely has committed an unpardonable sin by ordering the crucifix to be removed from the altar of St. John's Church, Little Gidding. The *Church Times* administers a severe rebuke to his lordship for daring to "banish the holy symbol of our faith from God's house." And yet we are told that Protestantism is free from idol-worship and every other form of superstition. In the Anglican communion in particular, superstition is largely on the increase.

An unofficial census of church and chapel attendance on Sunday evenings in London has just been taken, and "the habitual churchgoer" who undertook the work reports that, "as compared with the *Daily News* census figures of 1908, there is, in almost every case, a distinct decrease, sometimes scores taking the place of hundreds." The conclusion arrived at by this person is that "the War has reduced the attendance of men much beyond the number enlisted." So far as the British are concerned, the influence of the War upon religion has already proved eminently deleterious. Sorrowfully, "the habitual churchgoer" has to confess that "it has been saddening to pass out of buildings, put up at much sacrificial effort by generous and self-deceiving church members, now forsaken by almost all but the faithful few."

A Christian Endeavor party, numbering twenty-seven people, were thrown out of a charabanc near Chepstow, dropping over an embankment twenty feet high. None were killed, but all were more or less injured. If it had been a party of Atheists, there would have been a very serious moral attaching to the accident. As it is, the party will no doubt praise God because they were not all killed. Whom they will thank for their wounds we do not know.

More angels at the Front! This time on the German side. The *Daily Chronicle* of August 28 says that a German paper is giving a picture of crowds of angels—nude figures on horseback, brandishing swords—leading on the troops. The angels are the ghosts of dead German warriors who have returned to fight for the Fatherland. It is a pity that the two lots of angels cannot be left to fight out the quarrel between them. But it is evident that we are not to have it all our own way in the matter of angelic visitations. And when it comes to a competition in—call it the exercise of the imagination—between English and German Christians, the latter may be trusted to give a good account of themselves.

SOMETHING LEFT.

Dean Inge says that Hell (among other things) is little spoken of now from the pulpit. He should go to Cornwall. It is only a little while ago that a local preacher was addressing his flock, on that stony promontory which is the beginning and the end of England, on the text: "In those days many false prophets shall rise." He expounded every word of his text until he came to "false prophets." There were many of them in our own day, he said, "There's 'Erbert Spencer; there's 'Uxley ('ave any of 'ee 'ereed of 'Uxley?); there's Ingersoll, over yonder in 'Merika—all false phrphets." And he wound up by saying: "They've robbed us of this, they've robbed us of that, they've robbed us of the other thing; but oh, my dear brothers and sisters, praised be the Lord, they haven't been able to rob us of 'ell fire!"—*Straits Echo*, Federated Malay States.

To Correspondents.

EDITOR'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1915.—Received from March 15: Previously acknowledged, £140 2s. 10d. Received since:— W. L., 2s. 6d.; H. Haze, 6s.; N. Gould (Griqualand East), £1.

B. BAZZ.—Sorry, but it is quite impossible to find space for all that our readers may consider interesting. We are very pleased indeed to receive cuttings, and our paragraph columns show how useful we find them. But we are bound to exercise the privilege of selection.

H. A. HAZE, in subscribing to the Honorarium Fund writes, "Our paper is as good as ever. We are taking two copies during war-time, and see that they are not idle or wasted." This is a practical way of helping, and serves the dual purpose of making new converts and finding fresh readers.

J. H.—Thanks. Crowded out last week, and too late for use in this issue.

"COURAGE."—Your friend's reply to the writer in the *Essex Herald*, who advises everybody to pray "morning, noon, and night," is very apt, and hits off the situation admirably. We have said before, and we repeat it now, that Freethinkers all over the country would do well to avail themselves more liberally of the opportunities offered them in the correspondence columns of their local press.

M.—You may recall the old prayer, "Lord, protect me from my friends, I can look after my enemies myself."

W. HALL.—See "Acid Drops." With regard to your other question, Materialists never imagined that anything could grow without the latent power of growth. The statement is simply nonsensical. It is puzzling only in the sense that an unintelligible proposition is puzzling.

W. HAZELDE.—Private Cleaver is, we agree, very clever. Presumably he knew they were angels because he had never seen any before. The whole story is a fine commentary on the skin-deep nature of much of our civilisation.

W. HAZELDE.—We have not the exact figures by us as to the amount received by the Church of England in mining royalties from Durham. We believe the figure is somewhere about £100,000.

Z. COYSEN.—Too late for this week's issue, shall appear in our next.

Letters for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 21 Farringdon-street, London, E.C.

Letters for literature should be sent to the Shop Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon-street, London, E.C., and not to the Editor.

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Personal.

I AM glad to see that more than one writer in the *Literary Guide* devotes space to the recent success of the Secular Society, Limited, in the Law Courts.

The writer of "Random Jottings," whom I take to be the Editor, opens with the following paragraph:—

"The unanimous confirmation by the Court of Appeal of the decision of the lower Court in the case of the Secular Society, Limited, v. Bowman and Others is an additional triumph to be placed to the credit of Mr. G. W. Foote, who, as we mentioned the other month, had the foresight and discrimination many years ago to devise and found an incorporated society which should have as its main object the financing of Freethought within the law. The Rationalist Press Association, Limited, is in some respects a similar organisation, and the fact has never been disguised that it largely owes its existence to the lead given by Mr. Foote."

That is good, honest writing, and there is no need to keep repeating it in any way whatever. It is a frank recognition of a successful piece of work gallantly done within many years for the Freethought cause. I thank the writer, and that is all that need be said.

The next paragraph is very interesting and enlightening to the point:—

"We were present in the Court of Appeal when the decision of the three Judges was delivered. The Master of the Rolls and Lords Justices Pickford and Warrington each spoke from his own standpoint, but there was not the slightest divergence in opinion on the main facts of the case, and as to the absolute legality of the Secular Society, Limited. The determining factor in arriving at a conclusion was the judgment of Lord Coleridge in his last great blasphemy prosecution—that there is nothing illegal in attacking or denying the fundamen-

mentals of Christianity, provided it be done in a becoming manner. As our readers will remember, this judgment was later supported by Mr. (now Lord) Justice Phillimore in the Boulter case, and no other Judge has since contested its soundness. There is nothing in the Memorandum of the Secular Society, Limited, to warrant the assumption that it may devote its funds to an illegal propaganda; and if it did so transgress, the law could see that justice was done. An incorporated society cannot alter its Memorandum without the sanction of the Courts, and that alone is a guarantee that the funds of the Secular Society, Limited, will not be diverted or misapplied. This is one of the factors on which Mr. Foote counted, and his prescience has been fully justified."

This writer has a more judicial mind than some Freethinkers who have praised me for my scheme without seeing some valuable points about it affecting its financial soundness, which he sees is absolute, being guarded at every point of the compass. It does not want protection; it is self-protecting, being guarded mechanically as by the ringing of a bell, and having all the advantages of a trust without any of its disadvantages. Many people declared this to be impossible. I am glad to say I am sure it was not. A really important and well-stated point closes our contemporary's criticism of the litigation in the case of the Secular Society, Limited, v. Bowman and Others:—

"The desire of the Judges to be absolutely just, and not to be influenced in any way by their personal prejudices, was most marked. One came away from the Court of Appeal with a proud consciousness of the strict impartiality of the English Bench, with one or two rare exceptions, the most notorious (and most reprehensible) being the late Mr. Justice North. Probably the Master of the Rolls and Lords Justices Pickford and Warrington are staunch orthodox religionists, but they could not have pleaded more effectively for the rights of the Freethinker if they had been members of the Society. It was a red-letter day in the history of the Freethought Movement, and one could not be other than deeply impressed by the giant strides made towards complete religious toleration during the past quarter of a century.

"Whether the Bowman case will be taken to the House of Lords it is at the moment impossible to say. We understand that notice of appeal can be given at any time within a year of the decision in the Court of Appeal. One advantage of the case going to the House of Lords would be that, in the event of the decision of the lower Courts being confirmed, the validity of bequests for Freethought purposes would be absolutely incontestable unless a disabling Bill were passed by the two Houses of Legislature—which is almost an impossible contingency."

This is what I said myself in other words before my health broke down. I said that if we won in the Courts we won for ever, but if we lost it would not prevent us from fighting the next case that arose.

* * *

Another contribution to the *Literary Guide* is on "The Disabilities of Freethinkers" in relation to the Bowman Bequest. This article calls for an answer, chiefly owing, I should say, to one of the names it bears, and not for any special intrinsic merit of its own. I think I am specially entitled to deal with it because I am nowhere mentioned in it from beginning to end, but I cannot do critical justice to it in a paragraph or two. I must therefore postpone my remarks until another week. It seems to be taken for granted that Mrs. Bonner is the final authority on this subject, but she is thirty years behind the times at present. G. W. FOOTE.

Sugar Plums.

We print elsewhere a letter from a correspondent on the question of conscription. With the writer's hatred of forced military service we heartily agree. We believe it to be a vicious system, and that it tends to create in any country a dominant military class, the evil influence of which is seen in the present War. But we do not see adequate justification

for the imputation that our attitude is "one of silence and dormancy." We believe that the attitude of all Freethinkers in this country towards militarism is well known, and even among the large number of Secularists who are present in either the Army or the Navy that attitude remains unaffected. They are there not because they love militarism, but because they hate it, and hate it none the less fervently because they are having practical experience of its evils. This we know from the large number of letters we have received from Freethinkers at the Front.

So far as the *Freethinker* is concerned, there has certainly been no lack of articles and paragraphs pointing out the injurious consequences of militarism, and those who look to us for any sort of help or guidance in the matter have no real cause of complaint. But if more is needed, we desire to say as plainly as possible that we are as much opposed to Conscription as we ever were, and we see no kind of evidence that the present necessities of the country demand its imposition. Those in power have not asked for it; and, in the main, those who have belong to that class which called for Conscription long before there was any war to bother about. We quite agree that these are times in which reformers should bestir themselves, but we do not see that it is our place to give the amount of attention to this topic that our correspondent would seem to desire. There are many other questions beside Conscription that are of great importance, for the *Freethinker* has a special work of its own, and it would be an unwise policy to neglect that work, even in favor of so important a subject as Conscription. The *Freethinker* is the only paper of its kind in Great Britain; it holds a unique place in British journalism; and it is surely not too much to keep that solitary paper to its special work. There are other agencies for combating Conscription, and those agencies are receiving the support of Freethinkers. They are not "standing by dumbly," and they are offering resistance as citizens to what they consider wrong or unjust. But, we repeat, our special work must have first claim. First, because there are none others, that we see, to do it; and, secondly, because the War has made that work, not less important, but more urgent than ever.

We are pleased to see that the *Labor Leader* has emerged triumphant from its struggle with the Authorities. The paper, along with numerous other pamphlets, were seized under the Defence of the Realm Act, and the Editor of the *Labor Leader*, with the Secretary of the National Labor Press, charged with publishing statements likely to hinder recruiting and prejudice this country's relations with foreign powers. The case was heard in camera, but the Stipendiary, Mr. P. W. Atkin, decided to dismiss the charge against the paper, and ordered the copies seized to be returned. Certain pamphlets were, however, ordered to be destroyed, and the type returned, provided an undertaking was given not to reissue these publications. There are too few papers maintained in the interests of an opinion, for us not to congratulate the *Labor Leader* on its success. The need for such papers is not less now, but greater than ever.

Writing of Labor papers reminds us that the *Clarion*, in spite of a reduction in size, and a curtailing of expenses, has found it necessary to appeal to its readers for a sum of about £20 per week, in order to keep the paper going. The appeal has met with some considerable response, and we hope it will achieve its purpose. But the difficulty experienced by the *Clarion* in keeping afloat serves to impress us with the "miracle" of keeping such a paper as the *Freethinker* alive. There has been no reduction in the size or the number of pages; everything has remained as it was, and except for the nature of some of the articles, its readers would be unaware that such a war as the present one was in being. The "miracle" of Mons is nothing at the side of this. The angels only appeared there once. We appear fifty-two times each year.

But we are not by any means out of the wood, and none of us can tell what the future may hold in store. Things may improve, or they may get worse; but one way or the other, the task of keeping a Freethought paper going will still remain an achievement. We hope that all our readers will bear this in mind, and will remember that every fresh subscriber gained makes the burden lighter and the future more secure. One South Wales enthusiast, by taking charge of the paper in his district, has succeeded in adding about sixty new readers to the *Freethinker*. Every one may not, of course, be able to do as much; but we feel sure that many who are at present doing nothing could do something. And the sooner that something is done the better for the whole of our movement.

Famous Freethinkers I Have Known.—VIII.

JOHN M. ROBERTSON, M.P.

SO far, all the famous Freethinkers I have dealt with in this series have been of the avowedly militant order of mind; men and women whose chief aim has been to destroy the insidious germs of superstition in the minds of Christians and others, and lead them, step by step, along the road to a more rational interpretation of Nature and of man. But there are some who think that the time for a frontal attack upon the old superstition has gone, and that a systematic attempt to undermine the whole fabric of Christianity by the teaching of modern science, and rational deductions from such teaching, are more likely to bring about a change of religious belief than the constant hammering away at the old fallacies of Bible teaching, or the still older and more effete teachings of theology.

Mr. John M. Robertson belongs to the latter school. For over thirty years he has been a leading exponent of the Rationalistic Philosophy in this country, and by his teachings and writings has done much to break down the old superstition, and point the road to a more reasonable theory of the universe, and a more practical and useful philosophy of daily life.

I first had the pleasure of meeting Mr. J. M. Robertson as long ago as 1880. Somebody had induced me, when I was quite a young man, to accept an invitation to lecture at "the Secular Society, Edinburgh." I had already lectured at some of the more important provincial societies in the country, where the major portion of the audience consisted of the artisan class, but I had never ventured so far as Scotland, especially to that seat of learning—the modern Athens—the City of Edinburgh. But I went with a light heart. When, however, I learned that among my audience were such promising young men of light and leading as Mr. J. M. Robertson, Mr. Joseph Mazzini Wheeler, and Mr. Martin, I began to feel a little uneasy as to the success of my lecture. After the chairman, in a very brief speech, had introduced me to the audience, I opened my part of the proceedings by giving a dramatic recital.

My impression is that Mr. Robertson thought I was trying to shirk or postpone the ordeal of that dreadful lecture by an attempt to give a display of elocutionary skill—and he was probably right. At all events, the lecture, which was on "Secularism as the True Philosophy of Daily Life," came at last, and after I had answered, in some sort of fashion, an old gentleman who spoke with a broad Scotch accent, and whom I had great difficulty in understanding, the proceedings closed, and I went into the committee-room and was overjoyed to get some words of encouragement from Mr. Robertson and other members of the committee for the work I was trying to do for Freethought. I always liked Mr. Robertson after that.

When in 1884 I saw it announced that Mr. Robertson had been asked by Mr. Bradlaugh to join the staff of the *National Reformer* I was delighted, and I remember the keen interest with which I read his contributions to that journal.

According to *Who's Who*, John Mackinnon Robertson was born at Arran on November 14, 1856; his parents and relations were extremely religious, and young Robertson went through the usual ordeal which all Freethinkers have to pass in breaking away from early religious associations and friendships.

The intellect of the average Scotsman is singularly logical, and young Robertson, who was far above the average of that remarkable race—even as a youth—soon began to find that his knowledge of science, history, and philosophy would not fit in with the narrow creed of his childhood, and he gradually developed into a pronounced Freethinker of the most advanced type. After having served an apprenticeship on the staff of the *Edinburgh Evening News* in which, among other duties, he took on that of

"Dramatic Critic," he came straight over to the aid of the *National Reformer*, and worked on it as contributor up to the time of the death of Charles Bradlaugh, and for the last three years of its existence as its editor. In addition to this, Mr. Robertson devoted a good deal of his time to lecturing on Free-thought in London and the provinces.

A fine athletic man with handsome, classical features, fine head, jet black hair, bearded like the pard, with a most impressive style of address, and splendid argumentative powers, these, added to remarkable oratorical powers, made him a great attraction as a lecturer at various centres throughout the country. I heard him on several occasions, and was always profoundly impressed by his lucid methods of exposition and convincing power of logic. He was also a very skillful debater as a young man, and this power has developed to an extraordinary degree during many years of platform experience. His skill in analysing an argument, in dividing and sub-dividing it into parts, until he had got to the very heart of it, so that he could speak, was extremely clever, and then to watch him expose its fallacies, soon convinced his hearers that they were listening to a logician and debater of the highest order.

On one occasion I heard him lecture before "the South London Ethical Society" at the Surrey Athletic Hall, Camberwell, on "Atheism." It was not at all a militant kind of lecture, but by its profound thought and logical analysis of arguments, demonstrated as clearly as any argument could the inherent weakness of the case for Theism. On another occasion I heard Mr. Robertson speak at an anniversary dinner of the "Bradlaugh Fellowship" at the Shoreditch Radical Club, and, speaking to the toast of the memory of the late Charles Bradlaugh, he delivered one of the most comprehensive and masterly speeches I have heard on the subject—and I have heard such accomplished orators as George William Foote, Horatio Bottomley, and George Bernard Shaw on the same theme. Always very devoted to the memory of Charles Bradlaugh, Mr. Robertson's contribution to the second volume of *The Life of Charles Bradlaugh*, by his daughter, Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, will stand as a painstaking study of a great man who was sometimes earnestly strove to serve.

The last time I heard Mr. Robertson speak was at Dalwich Public Baths on the Political Situation. A friend of mine, an Irishman and a Roman Catholic, came with me. He had very strong prejudices against Mr. Robertson on account of his Freethought views, but when Mr. Robertson, in very eloquent language, pointed to the good effects of giving Home Rule to South Africa, and what beneficial results would be likely to follow if the same policy were adopted towards Ireland, my friend's prejudices soon broke down, and he melted into tears. On this occasion Mr. Robertson proved that from constant practice he had developed into an orator of the highest order. Although Mr. Robertson continued to lecture on Freethought for some years later, he followed the example of Mr. Bradlaugh and devoted a great deal of his time to a political career. For a time he regularly put himself forward as a candidate for one of the seats for Northampton whenever a vacancy occurred, but as he did not succeed in Bradlaugh's constituency, he transferred his affections to the Tyne-side Division of Northumberland, and in 1906 succeeded in getting returned with a very substantial majority; and in spite of a very malicious libel against him on the subject of his views on Malthusianism, increased his majority very considerably at a subsequent election. As a Member of Parliament he soon distinguished himself as a debater and man of ideas, and the Tories found it necessary to put forward their best men to answer him. Sometimes that old Parliamentary hand, Mr. A. J. Balfour, who still remains one of the greatest dialecticians in the House, broke a lance with him, and in time Mr. Asquith found it necessary to take notice of the services of Mr. Robertson to the Liberal Party, and promoted him

to the position of Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade, a position in which he has greatly distinguished himself. When the Prime Minister, however, formed a Coalition Government, Mr. Robertson's services were dispensed with, but he was rewarded by being made a Member of the Privy Council, and his correct title now is "The Right Hon. J. M. Robertson, M.P."

But, of course, although we are delighted at the recognition of Mr. Robertson's services as a politician, we admire him most as a Freethinker. It was, no doubt, due to his influence that the Prime Minister some months ago received a deputation on the question of the Blasphemy Laws; and I certainly hope that Mr. Robertson has done something towards bringing the case of the freethinking juror who was recently grossly insulted by Mr. Muir at the Old Bailey, and told that a man "without religious belief" was "unfit to assist in the trial of a serious case," before the Lord Chancellor, with a view of getting all judges and magistrates to understand that Freethinkers are respectable ratepayers, and when they have fulfilled their obligation and taken the affirmation prescribed by law, they should be protected from the insults of barristers or solicitors in the performance of their duty as citizens.

Mr. Bradlaugh would not, I am sure, have allowed such a case to have gone unrebuked if it had occurred while he was a Member of Parliament; and I feel sure that Mr. Robertson will not let the matter rest till justice has been done and the insult wiped out.

As a writer, Mr. Robertson has laid us under a deep debt of gratitude. He is a man of encyclopædic knowledge; his painstaking industry, combined with his wonderful erudition, has enabled him to produce works of lasting value to the Freethought Party. His *Short History of Freethought* is a classic; the first edition of it was a wonderful piece of work, but the second edition, which runs into two volumes, has been carefully revised and added to, making it, probably, the finest work on the subject before the public. Among his other works are one on *Buckle and His Critics*, one on *Pagan Christs, A Short History of Christianity, Christ and Krishna, Pioneer Humanists*, and many others too numerous to mention.

Mr. Robertson once wrote a pamphlet with the attractive title of *The Fallacy of Saving*, but in view of the fact that the Government are now urging upon the masses of the people to be very economical, and neither to spend too much of their money on the tailor, or the butcher, or any other tradesman; and, above all, not to spend any money on amusements, and thus to starve the poor actors and entertainers out; it would not be quite the thing to recommend readers to make themselves acquainted with Mr. Robertson's arguments on this subject. I am informed, however, that a wag of a compositor once altered the title to *The Fallacy of Shaving*, which, to a large number of ratepayers, would mean economy, and would certainly be quite in accord with the present views of the Government on the subject.

Finally, Mr. Robertson's genius for work has enabled him to produce during a very busy life a perfect library of books of incalculable value to Freethinkers, and laid us and the rising generations under such a deep obligation to him for his services that I fear we shall never be able to repay.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Richard Jefferies.

Richard Jefferies and Civilisation. By Arthur F. Thorn. 6d. net. Arthur H. Stockwell, 29 Ludgate-hill, E.C.

IT is a significant fact in the history of the lives of poets, naturalists, nature lovers, and men of science, that the God-idea of Christians is often neglected or dismissed with contempt. Wordsworth was indefinite and vague in ascribing natural phenomena to God; Tennyson's sadness overshadows his best poetry, and leaves the question unsettled for himself and his readers. In other words, there is no decisive affir-

mation that the God of pretty flowers is likewise the God of earthquakes. To this problem the attitude of Darwin is too well-known to need any comment. William Blake wrote that no man can think, write, or speak from his heart, but he must intend truth, and we must therefore conclude that good and truthful men, untouched by the corruption of material gain, leave this question of God and Nature unsolved. From great poets like Wordsworth and Tennyson we should expect affirmations; instead, we are left with the dry bones of idealistic Pantheism, flavored with orthodoxy. In the light of these deductions, the negation of Freethought can be cheerfully left to fend for itself.

In the slender book we have before us, the author has presented Richard Jefferies in a manner that will appeal to all Freethinkers. It is a revelation of the heart of a man untouched by the blight of civilisation and Christianity. Richard Jefferies had nothing but scorn for the God of Christians; his soul refused to worship at the throne of blood and barbaric sacrifice, and he sought to find something worthier of praise and adoration. That he succeeded is ably demonstrated by a perusal of this book.

Who, but Freethinkers, treasure the precious gift of life? Who, looking on flowers, corn, fruits, or blue skies, can think of monasteries and the negation of life? Listen to Jefferies:—

"All manner of asceticism is vilest blasphemy—blasphemy towards the whole of the human race.....The ascetics are the only persons who are impure. Increase of physical beauty is attended by increase of soul beauty. The soul is higher even by gazing on beauty. Let me be fleshly perfect."

Mr. Arthur F. Thorn, who admirably interprets the spirit of Jefferies, in commenting on this passage says:—

"Our 'religion' is based upon the separation of body and soul. Hence, we have religious sects which concentrate upon the one to the neglect of the other, and in so doing worship an abstraction which has no real existence, a mere negation of the body—a nothingness. Jefferies insisted upon the flesh, upon the beauty and divinity of the human form; the sweetness of the body. He would remove from the flesh that stigma of 'sin' and uncleanness which has hypnotised man into a consciousness of 'evil.'"

Our author is on sure ground, for sin is the greatest asset of the Church. When man ceases to believe in this priestly imposition, over will go the structure of organised Christianity. Catholicism was wiser than those heretics called Protestants, when it held steadfastly to all mediums which act through the emotions—gold, ivory, jewels, music, and the Madonna; but man will one day realise that there are Madonnas everywhere around him, and that he has been tricked by that most elementary form of canning—the *suggestio falsi*. Similarly, there will be a reckoning with these pests of mankind when man discovers that religion has not given the world anything to approach the Greek idea of physical beauty. In its place he has had thrust upon him priests with tonsured heads, one of the sections of society whom Balzac describes as wearing black robes because they are in mourning for every virtue and every illusion. It is truly pathetic that simplicity in man is exploited by a useless body of men who would turn up their nose at thirty pieces of silver as the price of their hire; at the same time it is cruel and revolting to know that the finest part of man is the hunting-ground of priests. This would be impossible if it were not for ignorance.

"The world is not mad—only in ignorance, an interested ignorance, kept up by strenuous exertions, from which infernal darkness it will, in the course of time, emerge." Thus does Jefferies, with brightest visions of man's divine destiny, behold man's ultimate emancipation. From heaven does he derive this inspiration? *The Story of my Heart* convinces us that this confused jumble, the Christian's heaven, had no part in his life or his works, for he turned to things nobler and loftier; to things that give grace and elegance to the world. The sun, sky, sea, stars, trees, and flowers, in short, these with human love,

the Freethinker's heaven, the human heritage of everyone, the things which money cannot buy nor anyone rob us of, these were the source to inspire a noble writer. Of these we are sure; when mankind attains the level of commonsense, then will be the time to advance into the regions of infinitude; then, and then only. On this phase of our existence our author makes a pointed remark: "The fact that man is still fighting his neighbor for the bare physical necessities of his existence proves that, as yet, we have no really vital religion, using the word in its highest sense." Too true, too sadly true; and the slobber called Christian love seems as ineffective in the world as a butterfly dashing its wings against a granite cliff. Christian love! thy name should be written by the Devil. Love that has kept man humble, love that has made man a willing subject of deception, love that no man of commonsense can remember without having a desire to destroy it, so that the temple of humanity may be erected on firmer ground than that of faith. We are told that the mills of God grind slowly, yet we, as Freethinkers, would substitute Truth for God. From the unholy mess in which Christianity now finds itself, Truth may emerge, and the impostors of mankind will be seen in their nakedness. This will be no revelation to Freethinkers, who cherish no delusions about the utility of modern Christianity; rather will it ratify our judgment of those who toil not, neither spin, nor possess the beauty of the lily.

Mr. Arthur F. Thorn, a free lance, and an independent thinker, is to be congratulated on his book. In the language of Bottom, it grows to a point. There is nothing superfluous in its composition—it is learned without being dull, and it will hold the reader's attention to the last page. In the same way that a friend of the present writer described the reading of Rossetti's poetry to be like eating marzipan, so we will venture to affirm that Mr. Arthur F. Thorn's book on *Richard Jefferies and Civilisation* is like a draught of water from a clear spring. The earth from whence it flows demands no knee-worship, no ritual, no candles, no mummery, for we are a part of it, and Richard Jefferies took his place with the sane few in preference to that of the bewildered many, who blaspheme the earth with their talk about a place called Heaven.

WILLIAM REPTON.

An Open Letter to Sir Oliver Lodge.

SIR,—

August 8, 1915.
the battalion, I am moved to improve the drizzly hour by writing, under my waterproof sheet, and making some comment on your remarks as quoted in last Friday's *Daily Mail*, so far as I can recollect them. Incidentally, you may have been proud to notice that that enlightened paper gave rather more space and much more prominence to a champion of religion who finds Kaiser William in the *Book of Daniel* (originally mistaken for the *Czar*!) and Lloyd George in the *Book of Esdras*.

You attribute the War to the atheistic teaching of the veteran biologist, Professor Ernst Haeckel, of Jena, who has committed the crime of being the world's leading authority in a science in which you have been only a dabbler, and for not finding in the organisms which he studies the evidence for a Creator, which you have found lacking in the evidence in which you are yourself an authority of the first rank.

The fact that the Kaiser is firmly convinced that God is his ally, that the war party is that same religious party which Haeckel's name has always been anathema, is nothing to your bigoted fanaticism. You have but one excuse for the mention of Haeckel's name, and that is, the aged man, not unnaturally, has believed the German official line about the treachery of Belgium and the responsibility of Sir E. Grey for the World War. For this, who could blame him—were he a Christian? Meanwhile, Haeckel's bitterest opponents, the very champions of your views, are inundating the Press with attacks on Atheist France and Christian hypocritical England for attacking holy and man.

Germany in defiance of every law of God and man. Now, Sir Oliver, has it ever occurred to you that there is a want of taste in attributing the War to those whose views do not coincide with your own, when every Atheist and unbeliever capable of bearing arms has been called to fight for civilisation and democracy against the Hun? Do you

Is it right that we, who are fighting your battles for you, should have it continually chimed into us that we are fighting in reality not so much for our great ideals as for the domination of the Church of England, which we have despised, or the Nonconformity which we despise? I have come 6,000 miles or more to fight in this War, as a private, if necessary, and this is what one has to put up with.

Are our soldiers religious? The Bishop of London is a master in the art of saying foolish things, but he would have made a fortune in business. He has extraordinary ability in pushing trade, since he has been able, as an army chaplain, to command a congregation in khaki of any dimensions, and, incidentally, any religious or anti-religious views. It will perhaps be objected that some, at any rate, of these parades were voluntary; and I admit that, after the monotony of the trenches, there might be many who would like the trouble to fall in to see a live bishop. But I judge each parade by my experience. In the Boer War I only remember one "voluntary" church parade—voluntary at the express desire of the chaplain. At the hour fixed, the officer of the day alone appeared and reported "no party" to the colonel, and in fifteen minutes every man of that battalion was marching off to "voluntary" church parade. I had the luck to come across that chaplain's advertisement on his return home, and it read very like the puffs given to the Grace of London.

To come to this War. Military services were always compulsory in England; but, on landing in France, they became voluntary. At first, two companies with very religious officers paraded about fifty men each; two with different officers, not a man. The next week, fourteen were turned up from the whole regiment. Neither week has a single Nonconformist turned up at the Wesleyan parade. This week, the parade is again voluntary, but as the general is expected to be there, "the Colonel hopes that every available man will attend." Every available man has flocked in crowds to the "voluntary" parade, notwithstanding the drizzling rain; but the Fancy Dress parade, in military parlance, registered a "wash-

So, Sir Oliver, would it not be well if you were to cease making yourself ridiculous, and also cease to give the management of your great name to those who make the mockery of the infidels, who flock to the aid of their deity in the time of her need, a means of capital, against the deepest conviction. I shall die with "Church of England" on my identification disc, but what is written on the other side will make me a chaplain blush.

A. K. CAPTAIN.

In the Trenches, Somewhere in France.

Correspondence.

MIRACLES AND MR. ARCH.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."
 My attention has been drawn to a criticism by Mr. Arch in two recent numbers of the *Freethinker* of an article of mine in the *Nineteenth Century*, and as free discussion is the essence of Freethought, I hope you will insert the following reply.
 In the first place I must plead guilty to having made a careless slip in a reference to Galen. I was pointing out that one of the strongest reasons that have convinced Harnack and other critics that the author of the Acts and the Third Gospel was a medical man, is that they find in these works a very frequent use of words and phrases not found elsewhere, except in the Greek medical works of Hippocrates, Galen, and Dioscorides. Of course, I cannot prove that he was acquainted with these works, but I think it more than probable that he was, since, as a lawyer, he would have been acquainted with the use of technical legal terms, common to many particular text-books in which they occur. The suggestion in my article that Luke was acquainted with Galen's works was, therefore, a piece of carelessness, in pointing out that he is quite undoubtedly makes a fair "score."
 In the second place, I think he is quite mistaken in supposing the main object of my article he criticises to be an attempt to prove the historical accuracy of the writings attributed to Luke. I am sure that I am qualified to attempt such a task, and certainly it would be absurd to attempt it within the limits of a magazine article. No, Sir, though as a matter of fact, I am not qualified to attempt it, the evidence of the miraculous origin of Christianity, in particular, the evidence supplied by these works, is too strong to be displaced by the arguments brought against it, the article that Mr. Arch criticises in not too friendly a fashion was intended merely as a study of the mentality of German professors as illustrated by one of the most distinguished of them.

Professor Harnack, after prolonged study, and on evidence which to me seems conclusive, has announced his conviction that the Acts and the Third Gospel were written by a close companion of Paul, who was Greek by birth, and a physician by profession. As Luke appears to answer to this description, and as when we first hear of the Third Gospel it is ascribed to Luke, it would be mere perversity for anyone who accepts the above conclusions to ascribe it to anyone else. Whether, therefore, Harnack is (as I think) right in his conclusions or not, he has admitted the existence of testimony to miracles of a very astounding kind, set down for us by a contemporary who, being a Greek, trained in a Greek medical school, is, as I pointed out in my article, as good a witness as it would be possible to have of the facts alleged.

Furthermore, Harnack expressly eulogises in high terms this witness's general regard for the truth, sobriety of judgment, and freedom from superstition. But Harnack does not believe in miracles! How, then, does he deal with this evidence of miracles having happened? When I find that he simply gives it the go-by, with scarcely a comment, is it not fair to describe his frame of mind as pure dogmatism—that is to say, a frame of mind which, once having accepted a belief, persistently refuses to consider any evidence to the contrary? Such a frame of mind has been common—though perhaps not so common as you, Sir, suppose—among theologians, but it is by no means confined to them, and the object of my article was to suggest that the attitude of the German "intellectuals" towards the War is due to it.

I have no time to deal with Mr. Arch's animadversions on the varying accounts of Paul's conversion and his subsequent visit to Jerusalem; the difficulties involved (which I believe to be mainly due to want of knowledge) have long been familiar to me, and I will only say that they are not so formidable as to shake my belief that Paul's conversion to Christianity was due to a miracle—indeed, I confess myself unable to comprehend how else it is supposed to have come about. But with regard to Mr. Arch's last paragraph, I would say that I do not accept "the monstrous myth of the angels at Mons," nor have I met anyone as yet who does. Far stronger evidence than any I have yet heard would be necessary to make me believe in the story, but to stamp it as necessarily untrue appears to me at present to savor of that Teutonic dogmatism against which all of us, Christians as well as others, have to be on our guard.—H. B. SIMPSON.

P.S.—There are other passages in Mr. Arch's critique which seem to show that he has not altogether understood the drift of my article. I am, for instance, surprised to hear that I have represented the case against the historicity of the Third Gospel and the Acts as being "an invention of German professors." They have no doubt put the case more fully and (to my mind) more unfairly than anyone else, but that is a different thing altogether.

CONSCRIPTION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Whilst much time is spent by Secularists in pointing out the enormous value of freedom of thought, speech, and action, I am astonished to find that our attitude towards Conscription seems one of silence and dormancy. Surely if we believe as much in the liberty of the individual, what greater foe assails it than Conscription?

These are times for reformers to bestir themselves, for we now see stalking in our midst the shadow of a system which, when once riveted on a State, gives freedom a staggering blow and automatically confers autocratic power or tyrannical authority. The Yellow Press, combined with many elderly publicists and personalities who will not suffer by its adoption, are clamoring feverishly for Compulsory Military Service, yet we Freethinkers, who pride ourselves on our free ideals, are standing by dumbly, not offering the least resistance to this great foe of our cause. I venture to submit that we are betraying our principles by this inaction, the consequence being, that those of us who wish to actively combat the adoption of Conscription have to unite with movements outside our own with ideals not coinciding with Freethought.

H. RICHARD WRIGHT.

Obituary.

We are sorry to record the death of Tom Eynon, of New Tredegar, who was buried in the churchyard of Bedwellty on Monday, August 22. As a Freethinker he was always fearless in his exposure of supernatural religion; his speeches and debates resulted in creating a host of enemies, who did their utmost to crush him. As a miners' representative, he always proved his worth, and the respect and confidence of the workers was manifested in the large number who attended the funeral. Only 39 years of age, he leaves a widow and four children to mourn his loss. The Secular Burial Service was conducted by Mr. W. H. Powell, who paid an eloquent tribute to his memory.—FRANK HONEYBONE.

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NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Finsbury Park): 11.15, W. Davidson, a Lecture. Regent's Park: 3.15, Stephen Hooper, a Lecture. Parliament Hill: 3.15, Miss Kough, a Lecture.
WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. Finch, a Lecture.

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