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No man is the wiser for his learning; it may administer matter to work in, or objects to work upon, but wisdom are born with a man.—JOHN SELDEN.

Professor Schuster and Religion.

The new President of the British Association, Professor Schuster, has the misfortune to bear a German name. The misfortune is what one may term a contingent one, but the name has been enough to raise an outcry against his election by a certain number of people who seem to think they are serving England by cultivating a stupidity as great as that of the most conservative of Prussian Junkers. And being such, they are quite unable to realise that it is precisely this specie of unenlightened nationalism that has been utilised by the Prussian military caste to send Germany along a path that must inevitably end—if it has not already ended—in national demoralisation and ruin. The British Association was wise enough to treat such attacks with the contempt they deserved, and in so doing they will have earned the respect and the thanks of all responsible and intelligent persons. True science is in the highest and best sense international. The acquisition of a particular piece of knowledge must of necessity be local; but once acquired, it becomes part of that general stock which belongs to the race, and goes to swell the heritage without which man would be little better than the rest of the animal world. In sober truth there is no such thing as German science, or French science, or Italian science, or English science. There are discoveries made by Italians, Germans, Frenchmen, or Britons. But they are all parts of science, and belong to all, irrespective of race, nationality, or sect.

What Professor Schuster's opinions are in the matter of religion, I know not. He is by birth a Jew; but, judging from what he has said, one might hazard the conclusion that he has said good-bye to the Jewish religion, and has not succeeded in acquiring any other. His presidential address was singularly free from any reference to religion, even to the extent of avoiding the use of religious phraseology. It was the address of a man who loved science for the knowledge it gave, and for the power it conferred upon humanity of controlling its own destiny. This was seen clearly enough in his declaration that "Modern science began, not at the date of this or that discovery, but on the day that Galileo decided to publish his dialogues in the language of his nation. This was a deliberate act destined to change the whole aspect of science, which, ceasing to be the occupation of a privileged class, became the property of the whole community."

This is well said, and it is a truth that deserves emphasising. The democratising of knowledge means the democratising of power, and ultimately the liberation of the race. A priesthood, whether scientific or religious, is a danger to the community. Originally the priest owed his influence to the fact that he was believed to possess powers not within reach of the ordinary man. And in the far-off beginnings of scientific development there is ample evidence that the priestly class tried hard to keep

the knowledge thus acquired as the property of their caste. And Galileo saw, as others have seen, that the real and only check to this abuse of place and power was to make knowledge as common as it is useful. That is why the real reformer has always placed so much reliance upon education. The born leader of men will assert himself under almost any condition. But if he be a good man the extent to which he can benefit those whom he leads, and if he be a bad one the limits of his own aggrandisement at their expense, will be determined by the amount of trained intelligence current. "The hunger for intellectual enjoyment," said Professor Schuster, "is universal, and everybody should be given the opportunity and leisure of appeasing it."

The presidential address was in the main a plea for the cultivation of scientific pursuits because of the intellectual and æsthetic pleasures afforded, and an insistence on the danger of seeing in science no more than an instrument for amassing wealth or gaining material power. One is tempted to linger on this theme; but I pass on to another topic connected with the President—rather than with his address. A representative of the *Christian Commonwealth* obtained an interview with Professor Schuster, and put to him what lawyers call a leading question. Did not the Professor's conception of science suggest the question "Whether science is not ultimately compelled to give a religious interpretation of life?" Professor Schuster's reply was significant, and not a little curious. He replied:—

"You may not believe in a divine revelation breaking through the order of nature, and yet be a very religious man in the sense that you perceive design in nature. There are some eminent scientists who find it possible to believe in a divine revelation, but that is not because they are scientists, but because they are naturally religious men. My own knowledge of scientific men inclines me to say that there is no necessary connection between their science and their belief. It is not in spite of their science that they believe, but neither is it because of it. There is nothing in science to forbid the belief that the natural order was once broken by revelation. I think it is quite possible that the time may come when the scientific man will tell you that there must have been a break somewhere. That may be a possible scientific conclusion. There is, indeed, nothing to show that there is not a continuous creation. This is something more than an inference from the explanation of the atom which scientific men now accept: they conceive it as a centre out of which energy is continually streaming, and if this is continuously replaced we should have a constant new creation of matter. The scientific man may one day be able to evolve belief in a deity which can not only interfere in the orderly processes of nature, but which is actively present in those processes."

It will be observed that these remarks of Professor Schuster convey nothing that can be fairly construed as a confession of personal belief in Deity, or—so long as the word is used in a proper sense—in religion. So far as revelation is concerned, the assumption is in a negative direction. Some scientists "find it possible" to believe in revelation, but Professor Schuster is evidently not one of them. They believe "not because they are scientists, but because they are naturally religious men"; which is precisely what has been said by myself and others in these pages times out of number. They were religious before they were scientific; they are not religious because of their scientific attainments.

And Professor Schuster is absolutely correct in saying there is no connection between their science and their religious beliefs. This is the negative aspect, and it gives no support to religion. But there is a positive aspect, which does tell *against* religion. For while between the religious beliefs of certain scientists and their science there is no connection, there is often a very direct connection between the religious disbelief of scientists and their science. Their knowledge of nature has served to shake the religious beliefs which they once possessed, and set up an invincible obstacle to their continuance. The most that can be said of religion in this connection is that it persists in spite of acquired knowledge. And against that is the damning fact of the many with whom science has completely shattered religious conviction.

When Professor Schuster says "there is nothing in science to forbid the belief that the natural order was once broken by revelation," and it is possible that one day scientific men "will tell you that there must have been a break somewhere," one may be excused treating this as one of those verbal concessions that English men of science are in the habit of making to religious inquirers. Revelation from whom or what? Revelation about what? When the religious man talks about revelation, we know what he means. He means that man has been given by God some knowledge about himself, or about this world, or about the next world, that he could not acquire otherwise. Does any scientist, as a scientist, believe this? Is it conceivable that if they do not believe it now, they will believe it at some future time? Or, a deeper question still, is there anything in science that would lend a presumption in favor of the existence of a personality, answering to the Christian's Deity, from whom such a revelation could come? Not alone must the answer to this question be in the negative, but the way in which modern science has traced the growth of the god-idea to its origin in the mind of the primitive savage divests it of even the probability of truth. You cannot, by any possible process, get reality from a delusion; and the course of modern science leaves us without justification for belief in any source outside nature from which revelation could come.

If the *Christian Commonwealth* writer correctly reproduces Professor Schuster's remarks, one would imagine that the latter was poking fun at his religious interviewer. Creation, as the religious world has understood the term, has always meant a bringing into existence of something where nothing previously existed. Short of this inconceivable thing happening, what we have is not "creation," but transformation. There is a creation of new forms, but these new forms represent a transformation of pre-existing material. "Matter" itself may be only a form of this primitive substance, and we may have, as is suggested, "a constant new creation of matter." But this would not in the least confute the non-religionist, and it would not in the least help the religionist. The degradation of the atom may be a fact, but no one claims, and I am certain Professor Schuster will not claim, that this degradation represents an absolute loss to the universe of the force hitherto existing as the atom. That force is still there; it has only assumed a new form, and the continuous degradation and rebuilding, or creation, of the atom is only a phase of the eternal flux, which some of the old Greek thinkers recognised as the permanent characteristic of natural phenomena.

And, of course, if scientific men one day care to call this process Deity, and to say that therefore Deity is actively present, I do not know that any great harm will be done—except so far as certain people use the admission of the term as warranty for hanging on to their otherwise discredited anthropomorphism. What Professor Schuster says in effect is, "science knows nothing of a God, such as religious people have been in the habit of worshipping, but if they will be content with a mere algebraical symbol, the non-personal, non-intelligent substance which is assumed to be

present in all natural processes, then it is possible that one day science may agree to call this God." Maybe; but there are two comments that one may make upon this. First, a mere algebraical symbol is not God. People who believe in Deity do so because they conceive God as a personal intelligence, more or less interested in their welfare, and standing towards the universe in a consciously creative and protective capacity. Divest the nation of a God of this quality of conscious interest in human welfare, and no one will care a brass button about him. What is the use of worshipping a God, or of praying to him, or of bothering about him, if he is avowedly no more than a mere abstraction, with no conscious or intelligent interest in human affairs? Worship under such conditions would be a pure absurdity, and while many act stupidly without knowing it, it is difficult to imagine their playing the fool continuously while fully conscious of their folly.

Secondly, when people have attained intellectual development, sufficient to appreciate the scientific conception of the world, there will be no need to continue this farce of assuming that the idea of God is necessary for any purpose whatever. At present it is done because it is only a very, very small minority who have reached this stage of development. The vast majority are still more or less under the sway of supernaturalism. With a more thorough and more general education the temptation for scientists to provide verbal substitutes for Deity will disappear. The appeal will then be to a trained intelligence, instead of to a half-conscious supernaturalism. The dethronement of kings invariably accompanies the rationalising of institutions. And the dethronement of gods will as certainly accompany the rationalising of knowledge.

C. COHEN.

The Truth About God.

WHEN Mr. R. J. Campbell was at the Front, ministering to the spiritual needs of the soldiers, he held several informal meetings at which the men were allowed to ask any questions they liked. One question concerned Jesus' alleged claim to be the truth. The young man who asked it wanted to know in what sense Jesus called himself the truth. Mr. Campbell attempted to answer it on the spot, and on his return he dealt with it again in his first sermon at the City Temple, which may be read in the *Christian Commonwealth* for September 3. The question is of extreme interest, and many beside the soldier who put it would like to obtain a satisfactory answer, which, unfortunately, Mr. Campbell is utterly unable to give. The claim of Jesus to be the reversed found in the Fourth Gospel, which is, as the reversed gentleman has often admitted, a work of fiction. As usual, Mr. Campbell pretends to know "precisely" what this early novelist intended his readers to understand and feel in perusing his curious production. He maintains that the argument of chapter xiv., in which his text is to be found, may be summed up as follows:—

"God is the goal of all rightly directed human aspiration and endeavor. The aim of the spiritual man is, as it were, to lose himself to find himself in God. The way to do this is to live a certain kind of life, the life of perfect love, the life which Jesus lived. In doing this we are manifesting the truth about God, and there is no other way of coming to the Father but by living that truth."

We have read the chapter indicated with the utmost care many times, and we have no hesitation in characterising that summing-up of its argument as a grotesque travesty. Jesus is reported to be on the eve of his departure to the Father; that is, to be about to die. He is represented as talking about the approaching event to his disciples, assuring them that he will prepare a place for them in his Father's house, where they will ultimately live for ever in communion with him. He exhorts them to be of good cheer, in the certain hope that he will come

again and receive them unto himself. Then he adds: "And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Aware that his summing-up of the chapter must sound "a little abstract to the ordinary practical mind," Mr. Campbell cites the orthodox interpretation of the words just quoted, which is as follows:—

"Why do you call Jesus the truth, or the way to God, or the life of the believer? I suppose the ordinary answer would be that he is the only begotten of the Father, the Word by whom the worlds are made, the Mediator between God and man, the Lamb without blemish and without spot, in whom we have redemption from sin and misery, whose righteousness is imputed to us by faith, and so on. To know all this, we are told, is to know the truth. There is no other means of acceptance with God. That is what the Spirit of Truth witnesses within our souls. Without Jesus we cannot have our sins forgiven; cannot come to God; cannot become good; and cannot even know what the life of perfect holiness really is."

That is a perfect gem of orthodox teaching. We have no fault whatever to find with it except that it is not true. The quintessence of the Christian Gospel is in it; and in its light all the persecution, inhumanity, savagery, and religious wars of the last nineteen hundred years find their complete explanation, and even justification.

Mr. Campbell pronounces that epitome of the Gospel "true enough—beautifully, gloriously true," which he would not have done a few years ago. No sooner has he declared it to be true than he proceeds to demolish it. He asserts that "that life of all life which men call God is the life which is essentially love"; but that is an assertion based upon no fact of any kind. There is absolutely nothing to indicate that at the heart of things is eternal and omnipotent love. If anybody occupies the throne of the Universe just now, it is the hideous monster named Hate. Of the life which is essentially love all men are not unceasingly in quest, whether they realise it or not, and Mr. Campbell has no right to make such a statement; nor is the life which is essentially love "the one thing that can satisfy the soul." Not so long ago this erratic divine was in the habit of saying that whenever a man got drunk it was an outward expression of his inborn craving for God. The truth is that the majority of people do not want the life which he treats as ideal, and they only smile contemptuously when ignorantly told that they do. There was probably some sarcasm behind the soldier's answer, "How do you actually know what God is?" Mr. Campbell's answer is inept in the extreme: "It is unreasonable to say that we can know nothing for certain about the life of God." We retort, Why unreasonable if true? We do not know even that God exists, much less what kind of life he leads. Mr. Campbell confesses his utter ignorance when he says that "if God is anywhere, he is in ourselves." St. Augustine used to declare that the whole of God is everywhere. The swindler, the drunkard, the murderer, and the cruel maker of war carry about within them from day to day the whole of the Deity; and when they perpetrate the most abominable crimes against their fellow-beings, they are actuated by an insatiable longing for the God who is all the time hiding himself within them. They are indwelt every moment by the very Being for whom they are ever seeking and never finding.

Marvellous is the simplicity which the reverend gentleman displays while dealing with this point. "I have no means of learning what God is," he significantly admits, "than as I see him in your aspirations, achievements, and desires, as well as in my own." All men have not the same aspirations and desires, as some of us know to our cost. One man aspires to become a despot, who will rule his fellow-men with a rod of iron; does Mr. Campbell see God in his aspiration? For every one of us there are a higher and a lower, or spirit and flesh,

as St. Paul designates them; the spirit being pure, noble, and true, and the flesh essentially vile and despicable; and the question is, does the reverend gentleman see God in both, or only in one? If only in one, whom does he see in the other? Some people are magnanimous, and others mean; some honorable, and others treacherous; some compassionate, and others cruel; but does our divine recognise God in both species, or only in one? If only in the one, whom does he find featured forth in the other? Mr. Campbell discreetly evades the difficulty involved in that puzzling contrast. It may be true that "when we look closely into the nature of any human excellence we find that it can always be described in terms of love"; but Buddha said precisely the same thing five hundred years before Christ, though he did not pretend to see God in any human being. Is it not equally true, however, that when we look closely into the nature of any human demerit or fault we find that it can always be described in terms of selfishness and greed? Of course, the reverend gentleman concedes, there is in every one of us a strange admixture of good and evil. "You can find no full-orbed life of which you can say that in spirit, motive, desire, and achievement, it is a perfect manifestation of perfect love.....But it is, to say the least, an impressive thing that the man who wrote my text believed that the world had seen such a life once, namely, in Jesus of Nazareth."

At this point, in the presence of an imaginary Agnostic in his audience, Mr. Campbell becomes amazingly apologetic. To the Agnostic he says, in effect, "I shall not dispute with you; I am rather disposed to go with you a considerable way, admitting that on some points there is much evidence in support of your position." Then he adds:—

"I fully agree that there were many values in which the life of Jesus could not possibly find expression. There were a thousand problems he never touched, for they did not come his way. It is quite impossible to prove that he did on all occasions the ideally highest and best with his life according to his opportunities."

Jesus "might make mistakes, but the error of judgment would spring from no wrong motive. He might get angry, but the anger would never be on his own account. He might advise what we should nowadays feel would not be, under all circumstances, the best course, but the spirit behind the advice would be right." Jesus *might* make such mistakes, and show such limitations, but Mr. Campbell is sure he did not; but even if he did, the grandeur of his character is not in any way impaired. Of course not, in the estimation of a blind worshiper who builds his religious house upon the sand of unverifiable assumptions. "All I would point out," Mr. Campbell continues, "is that his followers thought that he lived a life of perfect love." It is really immaterial what his followers thought of Jesus, the all-important point being that the portrait presented in the Gospels is by no means of a flawless character. He was without reason angry with his mother in his twelfth year, and he brutally insulted her on the occasion of the wedding festivities at Cana. During his public ministry he declined to own her when she called to see him. That he hated those who hated him is self-evident from his vulgar cursing of the Scribes and Pharisees. The Gospels, certainly, do not support the contention that he was a perfect exponent of universal love. If he is the truth about God, then most assuredly God is not love; and if he is the life of all believers, then he has exerted a malign influence throughout the Christian centuries. His followers have always been the most contentious, litigious, and bloodthirsty of all religionists. And what do we see to-day? His disciples murderously at one another's throats, blowing up civilians' houses, and putting innocent men, women, and children to the most horrible death. Why, the Gospel of love is the most stupendous farce this world has ever known. The so-called truth about God is historically an undiluted falsehood. The British clergy disown the Christianity of Germany, and the German pastors see nothing

but hypocrisy and deceit in Great Britain's profession of the faith.

What Mr. Campbell gives us is sentimentalism run mad. What we all want to hear is the calm, sweet voice of Reason which, if duly heeded, would ere long put an end to all war and establish the reign of universal brotherhood, resulting in peace and good will among men.

J. T. LLOYD.

War-Time Reading.

"There is, fortunately, no truth in the idea of a sunken literature. It can never be submerged, so much as touched by war or any other external thing. It is an inalienable possession."—*Times*.

THE European War has interrupted many employments, but, fortunately, not the issue of cheap editions of favorite writers. The literature of relaxation is more than ever welcome, for it is so varied in mood, and because it enables us to breathe a little peace on the mirror of war. People seldom mingle their ideas, and the lack of thought that binds each reader to his own favorites, like a smoker to a special brand of tobacco, prevents poise and balance. Get ideas and study gravity was the substance of Matthew Arnold's discourses to his countrymen, particularly the middle-class, who took the advice in good part, and profited by it.

Among living essayists we have no Matthew Arnold. Maybe, the Rt. Hon. Augustino Birrell, the author of *Obiter Dicta*, and other delightful books, has inherited some of Arnold's spirit, his irony, his urbanity, and his appreciation of alien standpoints; but Mr. Birrell's flashes of humor are all his own. Hazlitt once said he started in life with the French Revolution, and he was baptised in a meeting-house. Mr. Birrell caustically remarks that "there were always more traces of the Revolution about Hazlitt than of the rite of Christian baptism." Concerning the pro-Napoleonism of some of the philosophical Radicals, Mr. Birrell says "It is wisest to hate your country's enemies. The Church allows it, the National Anthem demands it, and the experience of mankind proves it." Writing of lectures, he remarks, "The motives that prompt men and women to go to lectures on winter nights are varied, and include many which have nothing to do with respect for the lecturer or interest in his subject."

Other popular essayists follow afar off. Mr. G. K. Chesterton, who repeats the vocabulary of Free-thought with the faithfulness of a gramophone; Mr. Hilaire Belloc, who, with a certain metallic brilliancy, keeps his eyes on the path of Rome; and Mr. A. C. Benson, the son of an archbishop, whose works have a hearty welcome in many sheltered homes and country rectories. Here is an example of Mr. Benson's soothing method:—

"Suppose one could bring one of the rough Galilean fishermen, who sowed the seed of the faith, into a cathedral, and say to him, 'This is the fruit of your teaching; you, whose mouths never spoke a word of art or music, who taught poverty and simplicity, bareness of life, and an unclouded heart; you are honored here, these towers and bells are called after your names; you stand in gorgeous robes in the storied windows.' Would they not think and say that it was all a terrible mistake?"

To pass from Mr. Benson to Mr. Chesterton is to pass from the cloistered seclusion of a university quadrangle to the busy turmoil of Fleet-street. Mr. Chesterton is so jolly and so breezy a companion that he seems to say, with Sir Toby Belch, "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?" He displays a quiet fondness for Freethought, and in his writings his flights of fancy are often barbed with iconoclastic points which are as disconcerting to his own side as they are diverting to Freethinkers. Listen to this pleasant diversion:—

"Of all conceivable forms of enlightenment the worst is what these people call the Inner Light. Anyone who knows anybody knows how it would work; anyone who knows anyone from the Higher Thought centre knows

how it does work. That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones. Let Jones worship the sun or moon, anything rather than the Inner Light; let Jones worship cats or crocodiles, if he can find any in his street, but not the god within."

When Mr. Chesterton is most dogmatic he is most witty. Here are some of his good things:—

"Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead."

"Massacre is wicked, even with provocation."

"France is one torrent of splendid scepticism from Abelard to Anatole France."

"The nice Jew is called Moses Solomon, and the nasty Jew is called Thornton Percy."

"What is the good of words if they are not important enough to quarrel over. If you called a woman a chimpanzee instead of an angel, wouldn't there be a quarrel about a word?"

"Bad story writing is not a crime. Mr. Hall Caine walks the street openly."

"The Christian martyrdoms were more than demonstrations; they were advertisements."

"Those parts of the newspaper which announce the giant gooseberry and the raining frogs are really the modern representative of the popular tendency which produced the hydra and the werewolf and the dog-headed man."

"My country, right or wrong, is like saying 'My mother, drunk or sober.'"

"What have we done, and where have we wandered, we that have produced sages who could have spoken with Socrates and poets who could walk with Dante, that we should talk as if we have never done anything more intelligent than found colonies and kick niggers?"

Mr. Chesterton is such a boon companion, so fond of comradeship, so full of laughter, the joy of living, and the lust of argument, that the reader is content. We forgive the cunning monologue for the inevitable epigram. Mr. Chesterton simply cannot keep humanity out of his books. His big, breezy, jolly nature refuses to be cribb'd, cabin'd, and confin'd within the narrow limits of ecclesiasticism. Let him write what he will, he is always sure of an audience.

Mr. Hilaire Belloc has nothing in common with Mr. Chesterton. Although his outlook is Gallic, his horizon is bounded by priestly limitations to a far greater extent than his vaunt of Liberalism would warrant. If the Marseillaise is ever heard in his books it must sound like the horns of Elfland faintly blowing. Mr. Birrell dislikes Stiggins and Chadband almost as much as Dickens, but Mr. Belloc has so many hatreds, which he is for ever dragging into his writings. Protestantism, Liberal Theology, and the Teutons are as offensive to him as a red rag to a bull. Withal, he writes on "everything" and "nothing," and pleases his audience.

MINNERMUS.

The Land of Rubens and Masterlinck.

APART from the mournful circumstance that Belgium has once again become "the cockpit of Christendom," the little kingdom and its inhabitants command the enduring interest of civilised humanity. In *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, George Meredith, while reflecting upon certain striking characteristics of the Jewish people, causes one of his creations to remark that the children of Israel have received their training in a stern school. The races of Belgium have also served a long apprenticeship under similar trying conditions, and their harsh experiences help to furnish an explanation of the sullen and secretive demeanor which many different observers have reluctantly noted as one of their distinguishing features.

Although the country contained a population of over 7,500,000 in 1910, it is one of the smallest of European States. Its extreme length, from north-west to south-east, is 178 miles only; while its greatest breadth, from north to south, measures but 105 miles. In other words, the area of Belgium is not twice that of Yorkshire. In the south-east the

and rises to a height of from 500 to 2,000 feet above the level of the sea. This region, the plateau of the Ardennes, is mainly composed of Devonian deposits, though earlier Cambrian rocks are present in the most elevated districts. To the north, the ancient forests of Carboniferous Times have bequeathed to the country its magnificent coal measures along the valleys of the Sambre and the Meuse. Central Belgium is almost entirely made up of comparatively modern tertiary formations. The remainder of the country has nearly all emerged from the sea, as a result of the deposition of sands, clays, and loams, through the agencies in operation during the great Ice Age.

The Belgian summer is genial, and in the winter the prevailing westerly winds soften the air. The mean temperature for July, the hottest month of the year, is about 65° F.; and in January, the coldest month, it is about 35° F. The highlands of the Ardennes, however, have cooler summers and colder winters. Throughout the country most of the rain falls in the summer and autumn, and ranges from 20 to 40 inches.

In addition to its unfavorable climate, the Ardennes area has an unproductive soil. A few cereals are grown, and cattle are reared, but its chief pursuit is the raising of sheep. Only in the deep valleys are fruits cultivated, most notably the vine, in the valley of the Meuse.

The region of the great coal field is the hive of Belgian industry. The leading mines are in the neighborhood of Liege, Namur, Charleroi, and Mons. As in England and elsewhere, many of the great manufactures of Belgium have arisen where coal is to be found in the greatest abundance. Iron and steel products, locomotives and machinery, chemicals, glass and pottery-ware, are largely manufactured in this district. The glass industries of Liege, Namur, and Charleroi alone produce goods of an annual value of nearly £2,000,000. Verviers is, or was before the War, the great centre of the Belgian woollen trade.

Central Belgium is favored by the possession of an extremely fertile soil, and is, consequently, a great agricultural area. Wheat is extensively grown; sugar-beet is a very valuable crop; while flax is cultivated on the less generous soils. In Flanders, land that is naturally sterile owing to the sand which chokes the clay beneath, has been made to blossom like the rose. The Flemish farmers have raised the underlying clay and mixed it with the overlying sand, with the result that rye and potato crops yield high returns, while other important vegetation is most successfully cultivated.

Belgium is splendidly supplied with railways, and their development was facilitated by the geographical conditions of the kingdom. Indeed, Belgium was the first continental country to introduce railways. A State system has been adopted, and at the close of 1911 the Government controlled 2,697 miles of the full gauge system, against 218 miles which remained in private hands. In addition to this, there are over 2,500 miles of light railways. Brussels, the capital, may be regarded as the heart of the great railway system. Berlin and Paris are both connected by rail with the centre of Belgium. Moreover, the country contains over 1,000 miles of navigable rivers and canals, 900 miles of which are State-owned. Antwerp is the chief port for Belgium's important transit trade, and the old city is linked up by navigable waterways with France, Germany, and Holland. Inland fares and freights are the lowest in any European country. Travelling is therefore inexpensive, and this has proved a tremendous boon to the working population, and probably a larger percentage of town tollers reside in the rural districts of Belgium than in any other industrial land.

Industrially and racially Belgium may be split into two parts—the Flanders plain on the fringe of the North Sea, and the series of coal deposits which flank the Sambre and the Meuse. The Flanders folk are the Flemings, whose tongue is Flemish. The dwellers in the coal country are the Walloons, who speak a variant of the French language.

The Flemings are justly proud of their past. Their civilisation was the most advanced of all the Low Countries until the close of the sixteenth century, and their agricultural achievements in recent generations afford an example to lands endowed with richer soils. The cities of Bruges, Ypres, Termonde, and Malines are, or were until recently, monumental evidences of glorious, if departed days.

The iron and coal region environing the Sambre and the Meuse boasts fewer glories than the beautiful cities of the Flemish plain. But it has for centuries been celebrated as the battlefield of Europe, and a few of its ancient towns, more especially Mons and Liege, possess a long and unbroken record of noble craftsmanship. But it was not until the importance of coal in modern manufacture had become apparent that Flanders and South Brabant were deposed from their pride of place by the great industrial area of contemporary Belgium.

The Belgians are of mixed descent, and throughout the greater part of the country the hybrid nature of the people is strongly pronounced. But above all the various blendings of separate stocks, two outstanding types may be distinguished. There is the blonde, long-headed ethnic type of Northern Germany, which is usually in the ascendant in neighboring Holland. And there is the brunette, short-skulled form of Southern Germany and Eastern France. These two varieties may be termed Teutonic and Alpine or "Celtic." This latter type is most extensively represented in the Walloon provinces, although it is by no means absent in Flanders. In the Flemish provinces, however, the Alpine variety is very considerably intermixed with the Teutonic form. This last is to be found in its purest state along the sand-dunes and among the *polders*—those parts of the lowlands bordering on the North Sea which lie so much below the ocean level that they require protection from inundation. This protection the polders secure from the dykes, embankments, and canals, which relieve the pressure of the encroaching waves. Like all other European peoples, the Belgians are a composite race. As we shall see, this circumstance still counts, but the welding influences of evolution have not been idle, although the racial experiences of the last thousand years have set up a certain dissimilarity of outlook among the twin stocks which compose this sturdy, fairly progressive, and decidedly intellectual nation.

The achievements of Brabant and Flanders in the Middle Ages were almost obliterated by the wars of conquest and religion. From 1555 to 1815 the harsh circumstances which surrounded the Belgian people arrested all further progress, and would have extinguished a less hardy race. But with the restoration of something approaching their earlier conditions in the period subsequent to Waterloo, the native genius of the people reasserted itself, and the path was prepared for that remarkable development which has made modern Belgium the wonderful industrial and agricultural country it has since become.

In his delightful booklet on Belgium,* Mr. R. C. K. Ensor appears to attach small importance to the alleged ethnical differences which are supposed to separate the Flemings from the Walloons. He regards these differences as fundamentally linguistic, but allows that "there are also some differences of temper and tradition, specialised by historical segregation." Now, even if we grant that the racial distinctions between the Flemings and Walloons are insufficient to separate them into different stocks, the truth remains that important peculiarities in environment, and, in consequence, in heredity, have conspired in the course of centuries to evolve strikingly dissimilar characteristics in the two peoples. In any case, marked differences do exist, and it is unwise to pronounce judgment concerning the Belgians unless these differences are taken into account.

The country of the Walloons is hilly and picturesque, and was originally a forest-clad land. The forefathers of the present-day people were woodmen,

* Belgium. Williams & Norgate. 1915.

crofters, charcoal-burners, hunters, and shepherds. The more adventurous sought their fortunes as mercenaries in foreign armies, and they ranked for two hundred years as the finest fighters in Europe. Very few industries at that time existed, the manufactures and commerce of this district being of quite recent growth.

The historical and geographical phenomena of Flanders present a powerful contrast to all this. The country is a naturally unproductive plain, and it has taken the toilsome efforts of over a thousand years to confer upon it the opulence and beauty it now possesses. The barren soil was slowly enriched, so that it produces two crops, while much good land elsewhere yields but one. Open to the four winds of heaven and to the military invader alike, the church spires and city halls of Flanders were furnished with belfries, from which the people could scan the landscape when they feared the raids of their enemies. They fortified their country against attack, and built up a wonderful commercial civilisation.

The trading towns of Flanders steadily wrested from their feudal superiors their privileges and rights. The modern Fleming inherits the temper of the citizens who performed these deeds. He is the master of every detail of his agricultural or industrial art, but he is apt to muse with his face towards the past. This aspect of ancestor-worship intensifies his constitutional conservatism both in politics and religion, and his poorness in generalising power deepens the differences which distinguish his mental outlook from that of his Walloon fellow-countrymen.

The Walloon is of a fiercer disposition, and welcomes any suggestion which promises improvement. While the evolution of Flanders embraces many centuries of slow and painful growth, the Walloon passed rapidly from a primitive pastoral and hunting stage to industrialism of an entirely modern order. He has witnessed the applications of science to manufactures in a dozen different directions. He thinks that a policy which has practically solved the problem of production may be utilised to overcome the inequalities and injustices of distribution. He therefore inclines to look to political and social science as the real savior of the oppressed millions. Naturally, therefore, the Walloons are progressives of some shade or other, and they display an increasing tendency to adopt the theories of Socialism. The Walloon is frequently a Republican, and usually a Freethinker.

On the other hand, the Flemings cast their votes for the reactionary Clericals. As a matter of fact, the Catholic Government has been steadily maintained in power since its accession to office in 1884 through the suffrages of the Flemish-speaking population. This antagonism between the two peoples has been made more acute by the machinations of the Clericals, if not by the German agents, in connection with the language question. The Flemish speech is little more than a local dialect, an insular tongue unknown outside Flanders and Holland, where it is scorned as bad Dutch. Nevertheless, the Flemings treasure it, and, unfortunately, it is an easy matter to inflame their jealous animosity against the Belgian French which is common to all classes in the Walloon provinces, and is also the language of the educated classes throughout Belgium. The Belgian Clericals have watched with resentful eyes the checks the Church has recently suffered in France, and they have seized the occasion to embitter the discontent of the Flemish population against the deepening influence both of France and French ideas, which was distinctly noticeable in Belgium before the outbreak of the European War. The wretched language trouble has, unquestionably, been exploited for the purpose of widening the breach which previously existed. But so far as one can at present judge, the ungentle German occupation has done more to make the Belgians a united nation than all the earlier efforts of the greatest reformers the country has yet produced.

T. F. PALMER.

(To be continued.)

Acid Drops.

We have all heard of the soldiers who are clamoring for Bibles and parsons, and devoting themselves to religion, although they appear to be as mythical as the Mons angels. Anyway, they are not among the wounded at Torquay, as the following, from the *Star* of September 7, shows. We publish it as given in the paper of that date:—

“Mr. Bernard Shaw, who is staying here, heard that the wounded soldiers under treatment in one of the local hospitals wanted a better assortment of books than that which had been supplied by kind-hearted, but often unreflecting, lady visitors.

“‘I accordingly went to hospital,’ said Mr. Shaw to me to-day, ‘and took with me a list of books which I asked the matron to give to the men, so that they might mark what books they would like.

“‘I said I would give one hundred books, and jokingly remarked that I intended to offer a hundred Bibles, but if any of the men would like any other book instead they could mark it on the list.

“‘When the list was returned I found that the men had selected 72 general books, and they were polite enough to intimate that they would take the remaining 28 in copies of my own works.

“‘The interesting fact is that all the works of Ruskin appearing in the list were marked.’”

We compliment the soldiers on their taste.

The Bishop of Worcester convened the whole of the clergy in his diocese last week, in order to discuss by what means the Church might be released from “past mistakes and failures.” We should have imagined that present mistakes and failures might well have been included in the list. But if the Bishop is really sincere, we would suggest that the only effective remedy would be Hari-Kari.

It cannot hurt any person to say “God save the King,” says Dr. Stephen Paget, F.R.C.S. Unless they happen to be Atheists and Republicans.

The *Daily Mail* says that grocers are mental acrobats, for they can think of three things at once and keep smiling. Those theological thimble-riggers, the clergy, have forgotten more than the gentlemen who sand the sugar ever knew.

“Converted Mules” was a heading in a London newspaper. It was followed by an account of the taming of wild mules, and did not mention that any of the animals had found Christ.

At Whaplode, Lincolnshire, a bullock made a meal of an old umbrella-rib, which afterwards worked out of its body. That bullock would have sympathised with the “whale” that swallowed the prophet Jonah.

One of the most significant facts of the day is the amazing ease with which men of God contradict themselves on many subjects. It is the constant boast of all of them, for example, that Great Britain is a country penetrated, steeped, and soaked through and through with the spirit of Christ; while Germany, because of her Atheism and Materialism, has lapsed into “the darkest ages of degradation.” This sharp contrast between the two countries has been expatiated upon *ad nauseam* by the British pulpit, and is almost all religious journals. That it is a false contrast is self-evident to all careful students of ethnology, but upon this we need not enlarge.

The curious thing is, however, that the very people who harp upon that false contrast almost immediately proceed to demonstrate its falseness. According to Canon Newbolt in a sermon published in the *Church Times* for September 5, “the morality of the City of London is at a deplorably low ebb. Its night scenes are a disgrace to civilisation. ‘Do we not all realise,’ he asks, ‘the horror, the misery, and the utter shame of what is going on in our midst?’ Our novels are ‘nasty,’ dressing up vice in attractive colors, poisoning the young mind and making it susceptible to wrong and pernicious influence. The power of our drama has suffered a woeful degradation, causing us to ‘acquiesce in low, vulgar, and humorless trifles, which sometimes degrade the stage and impoverish the human mind, and make the imagination a very store-house of defiling stimulants.’ All this is said of Great Britain, the most Christian country under the sun; and the question that instantly leaps to our lips is, Of what benefit has its Christianity been to our lips is, Of what benefit has its Christianity been to our After all the boasting, wherein is it superior, or even equal to Heathen China? Will Canon Newbolt kindly tell us?

Now let us look at Germany through the eyes of the reverend gentleman who acted formerly as the *Christian World's* Berlin correspondent. He contrasts our London theatres, music-halls, and cinemas with those of Berlin, to the entire advantage of the latter city. The plays produced in London are "mostly ephemeral trifles," while in Berlin there are twenty theatres, giving comedy and tragedy and music in great variety, but in hardly a single case is there anything offered but performances of admirable plays and operas which are valuable works of art, and which are altogether free from the faults of our stage." In Berlin, the cinemas present pictures which educate and improve the public taste, whereas in London crowded audiences "look forward to the antics of a certain Charlie Chaplin." And the contrast is extended in other directions, wholly to the disadvantage of our metropolis. The point of importance is that Atheistic and Materialistic Berlin is in almost every respect in advance of Christian London. These men of God enlodge Christianity and damn it with the same breath; and thus they undermine the very religion whose champions they are by profession; for both of which performances we offer them fervent thanks.

Dr. C. W. Saleeby, writing in the *Daily Chronicle*, calls Pope "the father of hygiene." Papa was neglectful, or the worthy doctor would not be so busy.

The *sedate Westminster Gazette* is sometimes given over to a little levity, as in the following paragraph: "There is some irony in the fact that amongst the cargo on the ill-fated *Titanic* was a consignment of copies of a book entitled *Perennial Peace*."

The *Times* says "We fancy that the literary taste of men in the Trenches is not satisfied with an eternal feast of rubbish." This is not a compliment to the people who send hundredweights of tracts to the troops.

The first English Bible to enter the Imperial Palace of Japan, says a Reuter telegram, will be carried by 4,000 Japanese Christians to the Emperor on November 10, his Coronation Day. Evidently a large volume. Let us hope the visitors will not drop it on the imperial toes.

From the *Daily Mail* of a recent date:—

"The Rev. John Hilton, of St. Matthew's Church, Essex-road, Canonbury, London, preaching on 'The Angels of Mons,' said:—

"I find no difficulty in believing that God did actually raise the veil between the seen and the unseen and that He allowed some of those tired, weary, worn-out defenders of right, honor, purity, and truth to see that there was a wall of protection between themselves and the Germans, and that that wall of protection was a body of His own ministers, whom we call angels."

"The Rev. Father Ross, at St. Joseph's, Aldershot, said: The men were probably overcome by marching and the heat of battle, and this is the view which thoughtful Catholics take of the story of Mons. Yet God did at times so manifest His divine will, and intervene in the affairs of man."

Who says religion is not accommodating? You can believe both, either, or neither.

We are not surprised to learn, through the kindness of one of our readers in India, that the Mons angel yarn has reached that country, and is being utilised by Christians there with the customary disregard for truth. A writer to the *Statesman* says that seven soldiers, including officers, gave their names and addresses as having seen the angels. Which is precisely what they did not do. There was no testimony of soldiers, only the word of people who said they "heard" of them from soldiers. The only direct "evidence" was the sworn testimony of Private Cleaver, who did not go to France until the battle of Mons was over. Still, some Christians find the lie useful, and so, we suppose, they will keep on telling it.

Another correspondent of the *Statesman*, who signs himself "Indian Warrior," puts in a word for native "spooks." He reports that "a relative of mine," returned from the Front, says that "a party of Sikhs were similarly hemmed in by the Germans at Neuve Chapelle, and in dire straits, when they saw the figure of their native goddess Kali a yard above them in the air." The Germans saw the goddess also, and retired in confusion. "Indian Warrior" says that the Sikhs have no goddess Kali. "Indian Warrior" must try again, and be more careful in his statements. But we have often observed that of all liars the religious is the most clumsy. Perhaps this is because he is not

called upon to exercise as much care as those liars who deal with less "sacred" subjects.

At Belfast recently an old woman was prosecuted for telling fortunes by means of tea-leaves and cards, and a witness stated that people flocked in dozens to the fortune-teller's house. This partially explains why Belfast is so pious.

Speaking at a meeting of the Library Association at Caxton Hall, London, Mr. E. A. Savage said "the Yellow Press was designed as humorous reading for the Goddess of Truth." This remark applies better to the religious press.

The Bishop of Worcester opened a private convention at Malvern College, attended by over 400 clergy, and held to consider their duty in regard to the War. It would take more than the united wisdom of 400 clergymen to reconcile the Divine command, "Thou shalt not kill," with the conduct of Christians in the great European War.

Dr. Campbell Morgan's assumed omniscience is a peculiar feature of his ministry. His popularity has emboldened him to pose at Westminster Chapel as a Pope, authorised by special appointment to speak for God. He pretends to know exactly what God thinks on every point, what he has actually done in the past, and what he has decreed to do in the future. The great sin of the British nation is that it stubbornly refuses to take Dr. Morgan at his own valuation, or to believe what he represents God as being and doing. He says that the secret of our having become a nation is the governance of God. He sees "also the governance of God in the history of British colonisation. Our colonising greatness is not the result of our cleverness, but of God's over-ruling." This is not an expression of his opinion, but is positively stated as an indisputable fact.

Dr. Morgan is either egregiously ignorant of history, or has read it through deplorably colored glasses. Is he not aware that some of the greatest thinkers have dimly failed to discern any traces of the active presence of a wise and just Ruler in the history of the world? After studying the subject with the utmost care, Newman's conclusion, as stated in his famous *Apologia*, is this: "Either there is no Creator, or this living society of men is in a true sense discarded from his presence." Goldwin Smith, in his *Guesses at the Riddle of Existence*, arrives at the same conclusion, saying, "The Creator disclosed is one who sends not only his sunshine and his rain, but his earthquakes, his plagues, and his famines, alike upon the just and the unjust; who takes away by death the good man from the household which loves him and depends on him for bread, as well as the wicked man from his den of crime; who both among human beings and among brutes, seems to scatter pain and misery broadcast." But Dr. Morgan, purely in the interest of his faith, conveniently ignores what he calls "surface appearances."

A "military correspondent" of the *Daily News* writes that "bad language" is diminishing among the troops, and the "new soldier" "swears not at all." Obviously, the fresher the soldier, the less he would have to swear about.

Mr. Austin Harrison says "Lord Haldane is not the Holy Ghost." Not by a hundred-weight or so!

Professor J. M. Thompson, of Oxford, though a New Theologian, labors under the delusion that without religion society would immediately tumble into a heap of red ruins. "Happiness," he tells us, "depends upon righteousness, and righteousness upon religion." We agree with the statement that the condition of happiness is the sacrifice of all smaller and selfish interests to the ideal of righteousness; but we regard as false and pernicious the assertion that only that individual, or society, or nation, is able to comply with such a condition "which identifies the right with God, and worships as well as loves the ideal." Two incontrovertible facts demonstrate the falsity of that contention, namely, the first, that many millions of mankind in different ages have attained to a high degree of righteousness without believing in God at all, and second, that multitudes of people, in all times, have been ardent believers in God without rising to any notable moral loftiness, either of conception or of practice. Eminently pious people have often been, and are, notorious swindlers in business and shrewd hypocrites in society.

A new institution has been formed at Birmingham to revolutionise Sunday-schools, the *Daily News* informs us,

and in the training of children in such things as blocks, sand, clay, and other aids, will be used. We shall expect to hear that wooden imitations of Noah's Ark, with sample animals, will also be in demand.

The merry birthday of the Man of Sorrows is anticipated by a leading London newspaper, which is already collecting subscriptions for the supplying of Christmas puddings for the troops at the Front.

The dear *Daily News* is getting bolder. Criticising an American writer, it says, "while hesitating to commit himself to the crudities of Christianity, he yet maintained that there must be something that scientists leave out, something warm and kind, but not so warm as to cause inconvenient ecstasies, not so much a God as a hot-water bottle heating the cold bed of life." What will Mr. Chadband think of this?

"Adjutant" Joseph Templar, of the Salvation Army, is dead. We are not aware that there is anything either surprising or interesting in this item of news. Everybody must die sooner or later, and we scarcely think that Joseph Templar's name is known to one of our readers. Why, then, record his death? We do so because there was something very remarkable about him. According to the *Life of Truth* he was a converted infidel, a "professing Atheist." In 1870 he had actually travelled so far on the downward path as to set about writing a pamphlet to disprove the existence of God. And one night while resting, with the MSS. of his pamphlet beside him, the spirit of God entered his room, wrestled with him, and, "at fifteen minutes past midnight," God saved the soul of Joseph Templar. And Templar spent the rest of his life praising the Lord.

But he was not only a professed Atheist. He was also a frequent contributor to the *Freethinker*—which must have been before 1870, as Templar was a Christian afterwards. But the *Freethinker* was not in existence until 1880, so that either Joseph Templar must have been an awful liar, or the *Shield of Faith* is lying for him, or maybe it is a joint and co-operate lie. But there is no doubt about its being a lie. And by that one is able to gauge the truth of the rest of the story. It is extremely likely that Joseph Templar was just an ordinary specimen of the religious knave on the "make," who knowing the kind of food that would please the palate of a Salvation Army gathering, served it up in liberal doses.

Several of the newspapers have noted the death of a reputed witch in Essex a week or two ago, and have marvelled that such a belief should exist "within forty miles of London." For our part, we see little cause for wonder. The belief in witches is only part of the much larger belief in human intercourse with spirits, good and bad, even though it manifests itself in an extra gross form. But it would puzzle anyone to state a substantial difference between the belief that some poor old woman has had dealings with the Devil and the belief that angels have appeared in France to help our soldiers out of a tight corner. For weeks we have had people arguing for and against the latter; and whether spirits are seen in France or in Essex, whether they are good spirits or bad ones, is a mere difference of detail; and between those who have stood up for the Mons angels and those simple villagers who believed in witchcraft there is a very close family relationship. They are both representatives of one of the oldest of superstitions, which all our culture has not yet succeeded in killing.

Professor Gardner, of Oxford, and President of the Churchmen's Union, speaking at the annual conference at Rugby, said "men of science were under the heel of the Materialist movement." Yet the professor's clerical friends are always saying that scientists are no longer Materialists.

Concerning the Czar's decision to take command of the Russian Armies, the *Matin* says: "The Czar is the religious head of the Russian Nation. This means war to the knife." Does the French editor imagine that, prior to this, the rival armies were pelting one another with flowers?

Who writes those pious paragraphs in the daily press concerning the immunity of "sacred relics" in the War? A recent note said that the contents of a school "somewhere in France" were destroyed with the exception of three life-size figures of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and one of the apostles. If the remainder of the apostles had their "statues" also in the school, the scholars must have felt as if they were in a waxwork show.

Religious matters receive unusual prominence in the *Daily News*. Recently, twenty lines and a heading were devoted to the account of the funeral of the wife of a Y.M.C.A. official, whilst an earthquake was dismissed in six lines. Maybe the editor remembered the Y.M.C.A. is an industrious advertiser.

It used to be said that British Christians labored under the impression that heaven was a British possession. This War has served to enlarge the impression somewhat, but religion seems even now to belong to the Allies only. The Germans cannot have it because of their barbarities—although there had never been a Bartholomew massacre or Smithfield fires. Thus, the *Daily Chronicle* heads its account of a sermon by a Berlin clergyman, "A Blaspheming Preacher." What the preacher said was this:—

"Christ has made himself manifest in this War to many a German soldier. He has shown no regard for particular confessions. Jesus stands close to the German soldier on the battlefield. The soldier is visible, he is invisible, but they are both there, and both ready to sacrifice themselves for an eternal idea. He who has seen German soldiers in this War knows how Christ has become once more living."

Now, this is only what thousands of preachers have been saying in this country about our soldiers. "Jesus is with us" is the cry on both sides, with the implied denial of his being with anyone else. Sensible people smile at such claims, and treat them as specimens of religious cant. The good Christian on either side gets angry, foams at the mouth, and calls the other fellow a blasphemer.

The really effective antidote to this kind of thing is not reason, nor logic, nor learning, nor science, but a well-developed sense of humor. Few preachers, with an active sense of humor, could stand on either side of a firing line, making appeals to the same "Joss," and denounce each other as blasphemous rascals for so doing. They would have to stop "cursing" in order to laugh. A good sense of humor amongst the German people would have done more to kill the bombastic swagger of the Kaiser, with his claim to be the anointed of God, etc., than anything else. You may overreason reason, you may prostitute science, you may pervert education, but it is a much more difficult task than any of these to kill a sense of humor. A sham will stand better against anything than against a laugh. A cartoon is very often more powerful than a cannon. Humor is the great solvent because it is no respecter of persons or things. The man or the institution that can stand against it must be solidly based on enduring fact. That is why all shams and pretenders dread ridicule. The real humorist is the great civiliser.

£25,377 was the comfortable sum that one servant of the Lord, Canon Samuel Staffurth, left behind when he sluffed off this mortal coil. He was, however, run pretty close by the Rev. Frank Taylor, of Westmoreland, who left £21,100. Rev. G. W. Pennythorne, Heathfield, Sussex, came a long way behind with £6,684, as did also Rev. J. Lloyd, of Brecon, with £3,955. Still, they did their best, and others may be trusted to improve on their efforts.

Miss Jane Addams, the well-known author and social worker, has just returned to the United States, after her European trip. Speaking at a meeting of welcome at Chicago, she said that—

"One of the leading men of Europe, whose name you will instantly recognise if I felt at liberty to give it, said, 'If the War could have been postponed for ten years—perhaps, he said, 'I will be safe and say twenty years—war would have been impossible in Europe, because of the tremendous revolt against it in the schools and universities.'"

That, if it represents the truth, is one of the most promising things we have seen for some time. If the youth of the world revolt against war, recognising its essential brutality and barbarity, its incurable stupidity, and ineffectiveness to settle any really vital problem—we shall have taken the first step towards universal peace. And whether correct or not, the utterance indicates an important feature. It is with the young that the future lies, and to indoctrinate the rising generations of all countries with a hatred of war is to make it less and less likely to occur.

The Archdeacon of London, preaching at St. Paul's Cathedral, said that "human tears had sent army after army across the Channel, and tears had floated the fleet in the North Sea and the Dardanelles." How different to the "tears, like tears" that the poet sang of!

The *Daily News* comments enthusiastically on the attendance of the troops at religious services. The editor overlooks the fact that Church Parade is compulsory.

To Correspondents.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1915.—Received from March 15: Previously acknowledged, £146 4s. 10d. Received since:—P. W. M., £1; S. Leech, 10s. 6d.; A. T., 1s.; Charles and Collis Cade, 10s. *Per Miss Vance.*—H. Good, 6s.

H. C. SHACKLETON.—Afraid we cannot find room at present, but the subject of religion and war has not suffered from want of attention in our pages.

W. W. LEWIS.—We have received several such cards lately. This "prayer-chain" business appears to have a curious attraction for the lower type of religious mind. Apparently, such people seem to think that if they worry God sufficiently, they will get what they want. What they need is a straight waistcoat.

E. KNOTAKA (Calcutta).—Your statement of your experiences is very interesting, but it is rather risky work setting out to "explain" such events without a more intimate knowledge of the circumstances than your communication provides. Besides, there is no greater fallacy than to assume that one must have an explanation ready for all that occurs in this very complex world. In the absence of knowledge it is far more helpful to be content with a frank confession of ignorance.

J. DAVIES.—We hope your anticipations of a great development of Freethought in South Wales at the conclusion of the War will be realised. We certainly think there is plenty of room there for an energetic Freethought propaganda, and we shall be pleased to do anything that lies in our power to help along the work.

J. J. DAVIES.—Sorry, and yet pleased, that we understated the number of new readers to the *Freethinker* gained in your district. As you say, the number should have been seventy-eight, not sixty. We hope that your expectations of still larger sales as a consequence of Mr. Cohen's forthcoming lectures in Aberystwyth will be realised. Anyway, we thank you for all you have done to promote our sales. We hope that others may be inspired to emulate your example.

CHARLES AND COLLIS CADE, in sending their subscription to the President's Honorarium Fund, write to Mr. Cohen: "Please accept our congratulations upon your production of the *Freethinker* for the past six months. That you have had a very harassing time we are sure, and to have piloted our little craft through so stormy a period is a feat which justly entitles you to the esteem of the saints everywhere." Mr. Cohen quite appreciates the compliment paid him, and although the War has naturally made the past year a more trying period than would otherwise have been the case, he does not feel that it has been really "harassing." It has been a labor of love with him, and he believes that the same may be said of all others connected with the *Freethinker*, who have done all they could to keep the "little craft" sailing on an even keel.

B.—Thanks for pamphlet. We have added it to our collection for use later.

AMAZED.—Cause for sorrow rather than amazement. There is still a frightful quantity of superstition current in "civilised" society, and one must expect it to show itself in a marked manner under the impetus of special circumstances.

LEZAC.—Glad to learn that your appreciation of the *Freethinker* has led to a renewal of your first annual subscription.

MOORS.—You say "it is a pity that people do not behave like Christians, instead of merely talking." But judging from the specimens afforded by history, and that is the only way of judging, they are behaving as Christians have always behaved. That is the cause of best part of the trouble.

A. T.—Sorry, but we cannot recall the details of the case you mention. If you could supply us with more definite particulars—date, etc.—we might be able to help you.

P. W. M.—Thanks for good wishes. Will convey your sympathetic remembrance to Mr. Foote.

We have no space elsewhere to announce—although the notice will be none the worse on that account—that the Bradlaugh Fellowship holds its Twelfth Annual Dinner on Wednesday, September 22, at the Boulogne Restaurant, 27 Gerrard-street, W., at 7 o'clock for 7.30. There will be no tickets, but the price of the dinner is fixed at 2s. per head, and those wishing to attend must write to the Secretary, Mr. W. J. Ramsey, 1 Malvern-road, Hackney, N.E. Accommodation will be found only for those who write beforehand. There will be the usual toasts, songs, etc., during the evening.

THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 62 Farringdon-street, London, E.C.

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 62 Farringdon-street, London, E.C.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, giving as long notice as possible.

Letters for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 61 Farringdon-street, London, E.C.

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Personal.

THE other morning I was thinking about Thomas Paine. I don't exactly know why. Perhaps, as the old Bible writers say, the spirit of prophecy was moving upon me. Anyhow, I thought of the meeting I attended in America to assist in dedicating to that great man's everlasting memory the wooden farmhouse in which he lived, and in which he did most of his writing by candlelight, trying to illuminate his fellow-men, and where one night bigotry tried to curtail this benign work by attempting his assassination. That part of America has always been interested in Thomas Paine, for causes which I may leave for some other occasion. But many of the best men of the district were there, some not endorsing *The Age of Reason*, but all agreeing on *The Rights of Man*. I understand that the monument has been removed to New York since then, but wherever it is, it reminds men of one of their noblest benefactors, who had no gold to give, but gave them something better—the devotion of a fine intellect and a still finer character to the first principles, in action and in argument, of justice and humanity. I was thinking of these things and many more when the post-man brought me a packet. On opening it I found that it contained several documents, including an intimation that I had been elected a member of the Thomas Paine Monument Association, of Chicago, Illinois. This was certified as having occurred on August 11, so that no great time had been lost in apprising me of the honor. The certificate was signed by Edward C. Wentworth, President, and H. Percy Ward, Secretary. The latter will be known to many Freethinkers in England; the former bears a name that must have been originally English too, one of the families that went over from Cornwall or Devonshire, or some Western county to found new families beyond the Atlantic Ocean. Who does not remember the name of Wentworth in the seventeenth century; of the great and terrible Thomas Wentworth, the famous Lord Strafford, who, after serving his King, Charles the First, with prodigies of genius and valor, found out on the scaffold the truth of the old Bible adage (and both were Christians) "put not your trust in princes."

* * *

I appreciate this honor, I thank the donors, and I am proud to be associated with them in this way. I am always had a singular admiration for Thomas Paine. The keenness of his intellect was matched by the brilliancy of his imagination. He stated a truth in a way that men could see, hear, and feel it. Take the following epigram: "To argue with a man who has renounced the use of Reason is like administering medicine to the dead." Beat that if you can! It was in reply to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* that he poured his final ridicule on the eloquent Monarchist's pity for the beauty of a Queen (Marie Antoinette) who perished ignominiously on the scaffold amid the howlings of the mob, without thought for the millions of starving people whose misery had supported all her pride and indulgence: "Mr. Burke pities the plumage," said Paine, "but forgets the dying bird." And, then again, Paine is at his very best, where poetry comes to the aid of wisdom, and produces a jewel which (in Tennyson's language) sparkles for ever on the outstretched forefinger of Time—"The world is my country, and to do good my religion."

* * *

Mr. Ward seems to have settled down as the lecturer to the Chicago Freethought Society in the Corinthian Hall, which I see described as "the handsomest one in Masonic Temple." His lectures are delivered on Sunday mornings, and I am glad of this, for Mr. Mangasarian lectures in the evening for the Free Religious Association. There is room enough for both, but not, I should imagine, at the same time. By the way, I am glad to receive a photograph of Mr. Ward's son, turned sixteen, "a Freethinker, of course, who recollects your speaking

kindly to him when he was seven, and who desires me to send you his best wishes." The lad has grown in all sorts of ways, but I recollect him quite well, and reciprocate all his best wishes.

* * *

I have forgotten to say that the Thomas Paine Monument Association is organised and incorporated. The minimum membership fee is one dollar. A certificate of membership, signed by the president and secretary, will be sent to each member. Application for membership should be sent to H. Percy Ward, Hotel Raleigh, 650 Dearborn-avenue, Chicago, U.S.A.

* * *

The incorporation of this Thomas Paine Monument Association, which has already more than \$4,800 in hand, prompts Mr. Ward to tell me how much the American Freethinkers rejoice in the triumph of the Secular Society, Limited, in the English Court of Appeal. Listen to this voice from Chicago:—

"I beg to join in the jubilant chorus of congratulations to you upon winning the greatest victory which the militant Freethought party of Britain has ever achieved over the forces of bigotry and superstition. My only regret is that the General, to whose genius the victory was due, could not be present to witness the final shot. Those who know how important a part Freethought plays in the social process will surely recognise in your magnificent triumph an event the consequences of which, in the long run, will be of infinitely greater value to real progress than any victory won upon a field of bloody battle. It is a splendid crown to a long-fought, a hard-fought, and a courageously fought campaign against Christian cowardice, Christian slander, and Christian hypocrisy. What Holyoake dreamed of, what Bradlaugh despaired of, you have brilliantly realised; and I feel with all my heart and soul that not one of us could praise your accomplishment too extravagantly. You have stolen a march upon time by erecting for yourself a permanent monument—in the Secular Society, Limited. The bigots robbed you of your personal liberty for a whole year. You have liberated the Freethought Party from the thieving hand of bigotry for all time. What a splendid revenge!

"The joyful news of the Appeal Court's decision enthuses me anew in my own evangel here across four thousand miles of land and sea. Surely, to those on the spot your epoch-making triumph in the annals of Freedom will mark a glorious revival in the 'greatest of causes.'

"I sincerely trust that your recovery to health will be speedy and complete."

Mr. Ward's enthusiastic letter, speaking the sentiments of himself and his fellow American Freethinkers, is very welcome, not only for what it says, but for the frank and manly way in which he says it. I am not one of those who deprecate enthusiasm, especially in the recognition of what the writer considers more than worthy of his eulogium. Besides, there is a certain charm in such writing when a young man is addressing an elder. It does not stamp a man adversely. Never to praise with enthusiasm, said Vauvenargues, is the sign of a mediocre nature.

G. W. FOOTE.

Darwinism v. Lamarckism.

IN Mr. Mann's article of June 6 last there are certain statements on which, as a student of evolution for more than twenty years, and also as a Freethinker, I ask permission to make certain comments in your columns. Mr. Mann states that, previous to Darwin, "There were plenty of hypotheses like Lamarck's, but they were only ingenious guesswork, and provided no proof," and states how Huxley used to amuse himself by defending the Creation hypothesis, in which he did not believe, against the various hypotheses already advanced. Now, as a matter of fact, Huxley failed utterly to understand Lamarck, and, so far as I know, ignored Dr. Erasmus Darwin, the grandfather of Charles Darwin and the real father of modern evolution, from whom Lamarck

borrowed his views—failing, however, to a certain extent, in understanding them, as I can prove from the latter's own works. I say that Huxley failed to understand Lamarck, and that can be proved in this simple way: The true interpretation of Lamarck depends chiefly on the meaning attached to the word *besoin*, or need, as used by him constantly in his great work. Now, Huxley (*Lay Sermons*, p. 290), in commenting on Lamarck, states that plants can have "neither wants nor actions"—thereby giving to the word *want* the psychological meaning of *desire*—whereas Lamarck simply meant by the term "want" the vital needs of plants, *i.e.*, all that a plant needs or wants in order for it to live and grow. Such a simple, yet vital, misunderstanding clearly demonstrates how Huxley must have failed when attempting to refute Lamarck. And similar failures are seen again and again in his writings when refuting Lamarck's theory. But the chief object of this communication is to point out the true position of Darwin in organic evolution—a fact much overlooked by some writers. Mr. Mann writes: "Darwin, in fact, supplied the scientific proof for which all the philosophical naturalists in Europe were searching; hence his great success." Now, undoubtedly, Darwin succeeded in demonstrating the truth of organic evolution; but he did so, not by scientific proof, but by accumulating a vast array of facts in organic life—which appealed to the minds of the majority of intelligent scientists the world over. When Darwin began his studies on evolution, the truth of organic evolution had already taken hold of many minds at home and abroad, especially in France. Darwin's object in putting his views before the world was not solely to convince as to the truth of organic evolution, but also to establish his theory of *Natural Selection* as being the means through which evolution worked. But in doing so, his facts as to the truth of evolution were so convincing that they appealed directly to the minds of thinkers, as I have stated; and in accepting the truth of evolution—the important thing—they accepted also his theory. That was the immediate effect amongst his followers. Later, their ranks broke; many, whilst being ardent evolutionists, opposed his theory of *Natural Selection* as not being the whole truth. It is sometimes stated that, as an evolutionist, Herbert Spencer was a follower of Darwin. As a matter of fact, however, some years previous to Darwin and Wallace's teachings, Herbert Spencer had published a work based on evolution. Spencer did at first accept the phrase "Natural Selection," but he soon, however, became dissatisfied with it, and substituted the name "Survival of the fittest," later to be modified into "Elimination of the unfit." Spencer, however, gradually became so dissatisfied with Darwin's theory as to state, "Either there has been transmission of acquired characters [*i.e.*, Lamarckism], or there has been no evolution." Darwin's great fame, then, rests, not on the fact that he answered the question as to the method through which evolution works (*i.e.*, the truth of his theory of *Natural Selection*), but on the fact that he arrayed the evidences of evolution in so masterly a manner that they appealed to the thinking man as true, as opposed to special creation; and, although his followers accepted his theory along with his facts, yet, as I have stated, the ranks of his followers soon broke, many maintaining that his theory was not the whole truth.

It is well that writers should always discriminate between the term *Darwinism* or *Natural Selection* and organic evolution, since many ill-instructed minds go so far as to hold that, if *Darwinism* or *Natural Selection* be disproved, the truth of organic evolution will also fall; which, of course, is absurd. Now, I maintain that never can evolution appeal to reasonable man in all its truth and simplicity until *Natural Selection* or *Darwinism* be disproved and the truth of the opposing theory—*i.e.*, that acquired changes, changes acquired in the right way, are transmitted—is fully established, and recognised as the true means by which organic evolution has proceeded and progressed. *Darwinism*, or *Natural Selection*, has never

been demonstrated scientifically, and Weismann, the author of *The All-Sufficiency of Natural Selection*, has admitted that it has never been, and can never be, demonstrated. The theory that acquired characters are transmitted is called *Lamarckism*; but really Lamarck borrowed his views from Dr. Erasmus Darwin—failing, however, in understanding Dr. Darwin in some particulars; and this failing has been one of the chief reasons for the misunderstanding of Lamarckism by Darwin, Huxley, and many other eminent men. The real father of modern evolution is thus seen to be Dr. Erasmus Darwin, the grandfather of Charles Darwin, the great protagonist of evolution; and I make bold to say that, had that grandson thoroughly understood his great ancestor's theory, we should have heard nothing of Natural Selection.

Darwin has become to many evolutionists even as a Pope; but we Freethinkers need neither a Pope in science nor one in theology. Neither is it right in us to worship authority, since in that way error becomes as truth by being stereotyped in our brains. What we should worship is truth, and truth alone. I used to be a believer in Natural Selection, although, as a physician, I thought there must be something in the transmission of acquired characters; and the truth of this latter theory flashed on me one day whilst reading an article on the reversion of the tame pig of Europe, introduced by the Spaniards into America, into the wild boar. Whilst reading, my mind reverted to my boyhood days, when I had watched herds or droves of pigs in all stages of domestication—how they fed, and how they attempted to protect themselves when danger was apprehended, as by a sudden noise, etc.—and the truth of the theory suddenly flashed on me as I have stated. Since then, I have always been able to see and understand clearly the processes of evolution. I have been able also—which is perhaps more important as to the truth of the theory—to detect the false reasoning of those who hold other views and attempt to explain the theory of the transmission of acquired characters. The question as to the means by which organic evolution has been carried out is one which should appeal to all scientific Freethinkers. Authority should be to them of only passing interest. I should therefore be glad to meet all scientifically minded Freethinkers in the quest of this truth. Darwin was a great man—had a great mind—but truth is greater than any man, however great. His work is abiding; but we should seek now, however, to find out wherein he failed, even in his great work.

I would suggest that those of my readers who are interested in seeking further light should study the writings of Dr. Erasmus Darwin himself, and also the great work of Lamarck. Of the followers of Erasmus Darwin, otherwise than Lamarck, Samuel Butler, that original thinker, was undoubtedly the most important. His writings on *Evolution* (*Old and New* and *Life and Habit*), when first named, were much disparaged by scientists. A comparatively recent issue, however, has been received by them as worthy of attention—one going so far as to recognise him as amongst the greatest critics of Darwin's theory of Natural Selection. In the Independent section of the *Westminster Review* I have endeavored to state my views on evolution in two articles—one entitled "The Law of Organic Evolution" (December, 1912), the other "The Laws of Lamarck" (July, 1913). If any of my readers become interested in the question, they will find that the views there set forth go to prove that, in interpreting the theory of Lamarck, writers on evolution have overlooked certain facts which I have endeavored to explain in order that full justice be done to the theory of the transmission of acquired characters, or the theories of Dr. Erasmus Darwin and Lamarck. The late Professor Packard, of Brown University, U.S.A., a staunch neo-Lamarckian, has written a book entitled *The Life and Works of Lamarck*. But, whilst Lamarckian, he yet failed somewhat in recognising the whole truth; and it is

only by recognising the whole truth in all its simplicity that the real force and value of the theory appeals to us as being the only means by which organic evolution in all its manifold manifestations has been, and can be, carried on.

Evolution, of course, is as old as the Greek philosophers; but to modern evolution, Buffon undoubtedly gave the first start. He failed, however, to understand the causes of change otherwise than those due to direct influence, as seen in the domestication of animals and in plants. Following him was Dr. Erasmus Darwin. He saw clearly how the changes were brought about—directly as regards plants, and indirectly as regards animal life. To his great mind appeared the true causes, i.e., that all organic evolution as regards animals is brought about indirectly through the needs or wants of the animal as manifested in species, not as in individuals. And I give myself the credit that, in studying Lamarck, and in finding out wherein he failed, I came to conclusions which I subsequently found were identical with those arrived at by Dr. Erasmus Darwin.

A most significant fact in the study of organic evolution is that biologists, whilst they have studied the evolution of the great nervous system itself, have paid little or no attention to the great role played in the progress of evolution by the nervous system, that great part of organic life which records, co-ordinates, and transmits characters permanently brought about through changed habits. It is undoubtedly through the fact that that great master mind, Herbert Spencer, perceived the true role of the nervous system, he ultimately arrived at his conclusion that without the transmission of acquired characters, there can be no organic evolution. To the evolutionist who understands how changes are acquired and transmitted, many unsettled moral questions can be answered with the utmost assurance, e.g., the question as to whether there is free-will or determinism—since, in the light thrown on the subject by the theory that acquired changes are transmitted, there can be no doubt whatever that there is really no free-will. And the consequent corollary, that each one of us is, in some degree, his brother's keeper, can clearly be seen as a moral duty. No; Darwin's theory of Natural Selection has never been, and can never be, scientifically demonstrated—a fact admitted by some of its staunchest upholders. Hence it becomes all Freethinkers to seek out the true cause of evolution, for only then will it become recognised as a truth in all its bearing and simplicity, and also that it is the true basis for all ethical teaching leading to the betterment of humanity.

Natural Selection—the survival of the fittest, the weakest must go to the wall, might is right—renders it possible for Bernhardt to make that awfully wicked, but false, statement that "war is a biological necessity"; for, on the contrary, as I have stated, the true teachings of evolution lead to the true brotherhood of man, irrespective of nationality, irrespective of race, color, and belief—a brotherhood based on broad humanity, and not on artificial ties.

Barbadoes.

R. F. LICORISH, M.D.

Jesus on the Stage.

THE PASSION PLAY.

A Lecture delivered in Chicago by M. M. Mangasarian.
THE theatre is one of the oldest institutions of the world. It reached a very high stage of development in ancient Athens. Immortals such as Æschylus and Sophocles wrote for the Greek stage. The statement might be ventured that the theatre has commanded the services of a greater number of gifted men than almost any other institution: Shakespeare, Goethe, Voltaire, Moliere—where can they be matched?

After the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity, the drama fell into disrepute. The severest laws were passed against the actors and the entertainment which they offered. A long and persistent effort was made by the Church to suppress the drama altogether in Europe. The sacraments were denied to stage actors. Moliere even, although protected by the great monarch, Louis XIV., was refused a burial on account of his profession. I have not the time to enumerate the various reasons for the onslaughts of the Church upon the theatre; but the real motive, if I mistake not, was an economic one. The theatre was the most formidable competitor the Church had. To use a commercial term, the theatre took business away from the Church. In the similarity between the profession of the priest and that of the actor is the explanation of this jealousy. A preacher is an actor, and the actor is a preacher. Some years ago, when Madame Sarah Bernhardt was playing in New York, the Reverend Talmage made a violent attack on her in the pulpit. The celebrated actress sent him a little note: "Dear Doctor,—It is not usual for persons in our profession to insult one another." Talmage was an actor; his church was a show-house, and it was the greater drawing powers of his competitor, Sarah Bernhardt, which nettled him.

When the Church found that excommunications, anathemas, or even severe penalties were not enough to wean the people from the drama, it resorted to a more effective and more subtle measure to put the theatre out of business: it began to give plays itself. Of course, it called its plays sacred, but they were plays nevertheless.

It was at this time that miracle plays, and saints' plays, and Passion Plays came into vogue. At first the plots of the plays were taken exclusively from the Bible, and the priests alone were permitted to play the parts; and the church was the theatre. Necessarily these performances were exceedingly crude. To begin with, they lacked a great text. Neither the plots nor the poetry of the Bible, generally speaking, could compare with the classical masterpieces. The Church plays smelled of the cloister, and one misses in them the merry sunshine.

One of these early plays, when the curtain rose, disclosed the Deity himself, dressed in a white vest, in the act of spitting on the ground and making clay out of which to create man. And again, in another scene he appears with a rib in his hand, which, he goes on to explain to the audience, will soon be turned into a woman. It will be impossible to create a great impression, or move an audience to feel deeply and powerfully, with such scenes—I mean a modern audience. The Almighty, with his nose in the mud, or dangling a rib in his hand, would make the audiences of to-day titter, or even burst out laughing. Before we can produce a great spectacle, or a drama of power and pathos, we need a great literature. But for an audience of the times we are speaking of, the religious plays, with all their imperfections, were very effective.

Examining the old records, we learn how destitute of real art the religious performances were. In the expense item for a play given in England in the early Middle Ages, we find the following: "Two pence for a pair of gloves for God; two shillings eight pence for four pairs of angels' wings; material for the soul's wear, seven shillings." The records do not explain what sort of material this could have been, but it is the most expensive item on the list. Another curious item reads: "Divers necessities for the trimming of the Father in Heaven."

We learn also from these ancient records that the performances given by the Church in the theatrical line were very realistic. The people who went to see these plays would not have tolerated or appreciated the least attempt at idealism. An educated audience can be moved with a mere suggestion, or an accent, or a glance, or a gesture, but the illiterate classes are more obtuse, and the most glaring realism alone can arouse them. If I may be pardoned the phrase, the lower classes demanded "blood and thunder" plays,

and the Church supplied this demand. In France the Passion Play was acted with such coarseness, and the man impersonating Christ was so brutally treated that he fainted on the cross, and had to be revived with salts. To the spectators of those days this was very impressive. In Germany the terrible realism of the Passion play drove some of the spectators insane. There is, for example, the case of the landgrave Frederick who lost his mind at one of these realistic Church shows. Even to-day the Oberammergau performances, lasting at a stretch for eight hours—a picture of gloom without any vistas, a tragedy without any flashes of genius, without a single smile anywhere throughout its seventeen acts—would break down the endurance of the audience were it not for the diversions, such as automobiling, music at the cafes, and other outdoor sports which modern life provides.

In discussing the Oberammergau performance I wish to exclude from my comments the commercial phase of the undertaking. How much money is made out of the Passion Play does not interest me. I wish to study it from the literary, artistic, and philosophical point of view. It is well known that the original motive of the villagers in presenting the Passion Play was to use it as a remedy against the cholera, or the black death, which in those days felt as much at home in Europe as in Asia. In 1684 the whole vicinity round Ammergau was terror-stricken with the ravages of this awful plague. You may form an idea of the violence of the pest in that year when I tell you that all the inhabitants of one of the nearby villages—the village of Kohlgrub—died with the exception of two couples. It is no wonder that they became panic-stricken. In the absence of science and sanitary measures the helplessness in villages appealed to supernatural powers for deliverance.

In those days man was a pigmy and the gods were yet mighty. In great fear of death and the plague, already referred to, the people of Ammergau went to church and made a solemn vow that if God would stop the progress of the terrible scourge—they had an idea he could if he wanted to—at any rate, they made a contract with him that if he would stop the progress of the plague, they, the villagers, would agree to have the tragedy of the Savior performed every ten years. There had been Passion Plays before this time, but it was in 1684 that the contract with the Deity, so to speak, to have a performance every ten years, was agreed to. It is also reported on the testimony of many clergymen that immediately after this agreement with the Deity had been concluded, like a black wave of the sea the plague retired, and no more deaths from it occurred. How naive! I was going to say, how stupid! I hope that last word will not be deemed unwarranted. What shall we think of people who place the Deity in the light of having actually sent a death-dealing plague just to compel the Ammergau peasants to sign a contract obligating themselves to stage the Christian tragedy every ten years? Would it not have been more creditable to the Deity if he had loved them into the agreement instead of plaguing them into it? But "God's ways are not our ways," and there is an end to all reasoning. The supernatural could enjoy full sway only in a South German village where the priest's absolute control has made an outcast of Reason.

The presentation of the Passion Play has been the means of greatly enriching the village of Oberammergau. From the proceeds of these performances they have built a magnificent theatre with a seating capacity of nearly five thousand. It has a stage that can easily accommodate eight or nine hundred performers. A large crucifix ornaments the gable, while paintings representing scenes from the Bible decorate the walls of the house. The village itself has adopted for its trade-mark, or coat of arms, so to speak, a cross.

As one approaches the town one catches the outlines of an enormous crucifixion-group, which announces to the visitor that they are in the village of

the Passion Play. This huge monument, on the day it was being unveiled, fell over the heads of the master mason and his assistant, killing them both on the spot; and equally strange, is it not, that the German King, who made this gift to the village of Oberammergau, was drowned in the waters of the Starnberg? The ecclesiastical writers who reported these events did not see in them "the hand of God."

Let me now say a word about the character of the big audiences at the Passion Play. *Sightseers* is one phrase which describes them—at least, the bulk of them. They come from all parts of the globe—mostly from America—tourists who wish to "take in" also the Passion Play while sauntering through Europe. This characterisation is not made from any disrespect for the people who enjoy the performances at Oberammergau. I only wish to say that these audiences, generally speaking, are far from being, in any sense, critically disposed. They are there to see, not to study; to look at, not to look about—the play. And most of those who have written about the play have had nothing but praise both for the actors and the drama. Of course, I could also join this chorus and go into ecstasies over the performance, but I am not going to do it. This does not mean that I am going to denounce the play; I am only going to study it critically.

What seems most to impress the generality of people who visit Oberammergau is the histrionic talent displayed by these German peasants. "How is it possible," they ask, "for these untutored villagers to play such great roles with such consummate art?" It is true that these peasants have never been to any school of elocution. Their stage master is a priest, and yet their execution of the parts assigned to them seems to satisfy the vast audiences that frequent the plays. What is the explanation? The majority of people are disposed to see the presence of a miracle in this. Their real purpose, I think, in belittling the abilities of the villagers in the theatrical line is to make room for a demonstration of divine power. Just as illiterate fishermen wrote the Gospels through inspiration, illiterate peasants impersonate Christ and his disciples by the same heavenly favor. This claim is made in so many words, but that is the drift of the comments on the art of the actors in the Passion Play.

But this argument about the acting of the peasants is all artificial. Granting even that their art is flawless, concerning which, however there is room for a difference of opinion, it is not a bit more miraculous for an Oberammergau wood-carver to impersonate Christ, and do it well, or for a German housewife to play the part of the Virgin Mother or of a Magdalene admirably, than it was for a ghetto girl—a Rachel, brought up in squalor, poverty, and isolation, to thrill Europe with her histrionic talent. And what was Shakespeare but a livery boy, taking care of the horses in the stalls of the Globe Theatre in London? Where did he get his education? Who taught him his art? Who was his teacher in elocution? And why could Shakespeare be explained without a miracle, while divine intervention must be assumed to explain Peter and Paul at Oberammergau, or Anton Lang and Joseph Mayer taking part in the Passion Play, is it at all strange, then, that among this number a few, after many years of practice, after almost a life of devotion to one play—a play in which they are generously paid, and who should show average, or even extraordinary, fitness for their roles?

(To be continued.)

Correspondence.

THE VISION OF MONS.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."
SIR.—The story of the appearance of angels before our soldiers at the retreat from Mons has been fairly launched on the expansive ocean of credulity and may safely be trusted

to go bounding along like Van-derdecken's phantom ship, the *Flying Dutchman*, till the end of time, or, what seems to be the same thing, the end of credulity. Like Macbeth's dagger, the vision of Mons (if it ever happened) were angels of the mind proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain, and not palpable to the feeling as to the sight. The lower our vitality the more brilliant our imagination, and, seriously, there is nothing incompatible with the facts of nature in the story, if true, as has been, under similar circumstances, proved over and over again during the course of human history. We can well conceive the shattered state of the nerves of our brave soldiers in that terrible retirement before the overpowering hordes of brutal Germans. Those unfortunate individuals afflicted with delirium tremens, the result of over-indulgence in alcoholic liquors, are in a similar condition; but, in this case, the images conjured up are mostly of a hideous character. It is needless to multiply instances, as most intelligent people are conversant with the well-attested facts. The pity of it all is, that otherwise well-informed people can be found to lend themselves to the propagation, among their ignorant and superstitious dupes, of such airy nothings, which become pernicious when put forth as evidence of the supernatural. I have followed the alleged evidence put forth as proof of the story, and found it so conflicting and, in some cases, deliberately fraudulent, that I conclude the whole thing is a concoction, the motive for which is to shore up that tottering fabric—Christianity. The propagators of such yarns, it must be remembered, have a business to push, and are not too scrupulous as to their methods, only they bring grist to their various theological mills. It will avail nothing.

JOHN ROBINSON.

Lines to a Too-Neighboring Church Bell.

TINKLE, tinkle, little bell!
Alias (what will do as well)
Broddingnagian lady's thimble,
Sounding brass and tinkling cymbal!
Ere the breaking of the day
You summon me to watch and pray;
But the effect is somewhat worse,—
I wake, indeed, but yawn and curse.
You cease; I think my troubles o'er;
Turn for the balance of my snore.
Thrice, thrice again your beastly jingling
Sets my poor suffering senses tingling.
Why this insistence on your function,
This unremitting non-compunction?
What the occult elusive reason
You clatter in and out of season?
It must be that without your din
Church-worshippers ignore their sin;
It tends to make the ungodly fretful
The Established should be so forgetful.
Now, only just across the street
Dreadful Dissenters duly meet
As punctual as the Orthodox,
Sans tintinabulary knocks.
Though no bell-summons split their ear,
They don't forget the hour of prayer;
Which seems to prove the Chapelites
Keener for spiritual delights.
Your loud performance, then, must be
Unspiritual superfluity;
Your jarring and nerve-shattering clank
But beastly pride and priestly swank.
But argument is knocked to bits
With one more of your savage fits;
Reason falls flat, logic lies dead,
My ink turns gall, my Muse is fled.
Wrangle, jangle, beastly bell!
How I wish you were in — Well,
Leave this blank, and softly say,
A place where you would melt away.

J. J. C.

Obituary.

SOUTH SHIELDS.—Mr. Henry Bennett, who twenty years ago was an active member of the above Branch, died somewhat suddenly at his residence, Gateshead, on September 2. The remains were cremated and the ashes buried at Pleasant Place Cemetery, Gateshead, on Sunday. Many years ago Mr. Bennett was appointed a foreman in the N. E. R. Traffic Department at Dunston, and latterly had been a regular patron of the Tyneside Sunday Lecture Society. Mr. J. Fothergill, a fellow-official, represented the Society at the funeral ceremony.—R. C.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday and be marked "Lecture Notice" if not sent on postcard.

LONDON.

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 3.15, A. D. Howell Smith, B.A., "The Trinity."

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