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PRICE TWOPENCE

Belief and unbelief are mere empty words; not so the loyalty, the greatness, and profoundness of the reason, wherefore we believe or do not believe.—MAETERLINCK.

On Recantations.

LAST week reference was made to a story told by a Rev. Macdonald Docker, of Halifax, of an alleged conversion of G. W. Foote. The statement was very properly and promptly challenged by a gentleman living on the spot, and after some delay, Mr. Docker—without expressing regret for having given publicity to such a story—admits that it was an “inaccuracy.” He had, as we were aware from the framing of the tale, confused Mr. Bottomley with Mr. Foote, and explains that words written by Mr. Bottomley when speaking of Mr. Foote were “erroneously applied to Mr. G. W. Foote.” But Mr. Bottomley is *not* G. W. Foote—not even a G. W. Foote.

This reverend gentleman seems chronically unable to tell a story that is correct. For, as a matter of fact, Mr. Bottomley's words were not written when he was speaking of Mr. Foote, but were written before Mr. Foote's death. A small matter, perhaps, but psychologically interesting as showing the type of mind that figures in the pulpit.

A sensible man—to say nothing of a just one—would have seen that the best way in such a matter was to candidly confess his error, and have done with it. But Mr. Docker attempts some sort of a justification. He says:—

“The argument of the sermon in question is, of course, in no way weakened, but rather strengthened. The public abandonment of Secularism by a man of the commanding public influence of Mr. H. Bottomley—perhaps the leading Secularist of our country—is even more noteworthy and lends greater weight to my argument.

The exposure and collapse of Atheism are becoming more marked every day. Professor Hergaard, of Copenhagen, for years known as one of the leaders of Atheism in Denmark, has become a Christian. He recently wrote how he sought and found peace with God. ‘There is only one anchoring ground,’ says he, ‘the simple but living Christian faith.’”

Mr. Docker *will* go wrong, even when it is so easy to keep within the limits of facts. And it is necessary to inform him that Mr. Bottomley is not, and never was, a leading Secularist in this or any other country, and, so far as I am aware, never claimed to be such—certainly not within the quarter of a century that represents my connection with Secularism—or a member of any Secularist organisation, and he has certainly never occupied a position of leadership or influence in any Secularist organisation. And that being the case, one is not inclined to treat the further story of the conversion of “one of the leaders of Atheism in Denmark” too seriously. One would like to have proof of that story. Perhaps, on inquiry, Mr. Docker may find he has confused a Danish scientist with Billy Sunday.

I do not intend wasting time or space on Mr. Docker's statement that “the exposure and collapse of Atheism” becomes more marked every day. I believe Atheism has always been getting exposed, and it has always been in a state of collapse. There

is nothing new about that, and there is nothing surprising—except that Atheism seems to gain strength by collapsing, and to become more general through exposure. But I do marvel a little—and should marvel more if this particular piece of stupidity were less common—at Mr. Docker thinking that the argument of his sermon was strengthened rather than weakened by the substitution of Mr. Bottomley for Mr. Foote. I marvel that any man with a claim to being a reasoning being should consider this an argument at all. Of course, I know that many do so consider it. But that only spreads one's wonder—so to speak—over a wider area. It makes one reconsider the definition of man as a rational being.

Now, what *is* Mr. Docker's argument? So far as one can dignify his remarks with such a name, it amounts to this. Mr. Bottomley, or Mr. Foote, or Billy Sunday became converted. Therefore, all they said about Christianity before conversion falls to the ground, and all they say about Christianity after conversion is undiluted truth. If that is not what it means, then his “argument” is without meaning altogether. And that is certainly an agruable proposition.

Now, why on earth should Mr. Bottomley's recantation, or even that of G. W. Foote's be a matter of such tremendous importance? What does it matter, anyway?—Suppose that G. W. Foote did recant. Suppose that Bradlaugh and Holyoake recanted before him. Suppose that the present writer will one day go the same road, and that every well-known Freethinker will one day follow suit. All this would be of great psychological, or even pathological interest, but that is all. And it would be interesting to find out what brought about the mental change, and what induced a man after being sensible for so long to become suddenly so silly. But I quite fail to see more than this in it. It is not what a man believes or what he says that matters, but what he *proves*. When a Freethought speaker or writer argues that Christian beliefs are untrue, he does not expect people to take his word for it—and they would be fools if they did. He shows them why they are untrue. His personality is a mere accident; and when that personality is withdrawn, the reasoning and the facts on which it is based remain. And the real task before Mr. Docker and his kind is to prove, not that the Freethinker has changed his mind, but that the reasons he advanced for his Freethought are unsound.

Will the conversion of Mr. Bottomley—which may be only for three years or the period of the War—prove the divinity of Jesus Christ? Would the recantation of G. W. Foote prove his resurrection? What connection is there between the premises and the conclusion? If every living Freethinker became a convert to Christianity to-morrow, the Christian mythology would be as ridiculous then as it is now. And is it not remarkable that the man whose reasoning powers are so faulty one day, becomes so perfect the next? The compliment to Freethinkers is quite unintentional, but it is delicious. The affirmations of millions of Christians are quite inconclusive. They do not convince non-Christians, and they leave Christians uncomfortable. But the affirmation of a single ex-Freethinker does the trick. The matter is settled. It really looks as though Christians are convinced that Freethought attracts the most virile

intellects, and that the adherence of one of these is worth a host of such as attend church or chapel.

It is worth noting that Christianity is almost wholly a matter of personal testimony. The Christian believes in his religion, not because he can justify it by any valid reasoning, but simply because it is his religion. His belief in the miraculous is based upon the testimony of someone else—usually someone unknown. The only evidence for the inspiration of the Bible is that someone said it was inspired; for the divinity of Jesus, that someone said he was divine. In this respect religion stands in a peculiar position. No one believes in gravitation *because* Newton believed it. No one believes in natural selection *because* Darwin believed it, nor in the circulation of the blood *because* Harvey believed it. These things are all accepted because they rest upon verifiable evidence, and are absolutely independent of personal testimony. But *Christian* truth belongs to a special variety. Not all the generations of Christians have ever produced a single scrap of evidence that could convince anyone who did not already believe. Christians *feel* this lack of verifiable evidence, and so seek some consolation in an accumulation of mere names.

Why should Christians be so anxious to produce these cases—genuine or spurious—of recantation? They add nothing to any genuine evidence of the truth of Christianity that may exist. I suspect the reason is a perception of the fact that the existence of unbelievers is felt to be an almost unanswerable indictment of Christianity itself. If unbelievers can be good men, good husbands, good friends, good citizens, wherein lies the necessity of Christianity? Above all, when men have known Christianity and have given it up, how can it be seriously asserted that it is essential to anyone? Or, if it is essential to anyone, is it not in the same way that crutches are useful to cripples?

I fancy there has always been a feeling amongst Christians to this effect; hence the taste for stories of recantation. They at least helped to perpetuate the delusion that unbelief was nothing more than a temporary aberration. And when Christianity was strong enough, it went to work in a simple but direct manner. It forced a recantation. If it could not force one, it manufactured one. It wrung a recantation from the aged Galileo; it placed one in the mouth of the defiant Bruno. As Christianity grew weaker and heresy stronger, the first plan became impossible, and the second had to be pursued more cautiously. Sometimes the heretic was bought, and was induced to praise a creed which he still held in contempt. When this could not be done, there was a death-bed recantation with which to impose upon the gullible. Lying confessions were invented and circulated to encourage some and warn others. The circulation of these stories became a profession, their manufacture a part of the Christian tradition. That they were lies mattered little. Where so much is false and artificial, a falsehood more or less is of small consequence. Mr. Docker is, after all, only the last of a long series of similar cases. His ancestry is a long one, and I have no doubt that he will be honored in the person of numerous descendants.

C. COHEN.

"Knowing God for Certain."

THE Rev. F. C. Spurr, of Regent's Park Baptist Church, has just published a book bearing the above title. It is an exceedingly bold title, and one wonders whether the contents of the volume justify its adoption. Does anybody know God for certain? The author himself asks, "Can we really know him? Is commerce with him possible? When we pray, is it monologue or dialogue?" To these questions, he informs us, the answer of faith is a "triumphant affirmative." He frankly admits, however, that the present is not an age of faith, that there are many people "who oscillate between negation and certainty,"

that "we encounter everywhere men and women who have lost their former confidence in the reality of spiritual things, and who now speak and act with hesitation," in short, that there has been a religious eclipse for several years. And yet, in spite of this admission, the reverend gentleman maintains that "religion is returning to its own," that "perhaps through disaster, misery, poverty, and bloodshed we may learn, as we have refused to learn in brighter days, the real value of the spiritual." We must confess our inability to discover any sign of a revival of religion in the City of London. On Sunday evenings, cinemas and public-houses are crowded, while most churches and chapels are half empty. In our opinion the War is driving more people away from religion than it is bringing back to it. People are getting to see more and more clearly that the Universe is governed by invariable laws, and that there are no evidences whatever of any supernatural interference or even of the existence of a supernatural realm. We have no knowledge of anything beyond Nature and her laws, and Mr. Spurr fails completely to dispel our ignorance. Trained thinker though he claims to be, his reasoning on this subject is entirely fallacious. Take his definition of "law" as an example:—

"Law" is nothing more nor less than method in the exercise of mind and force. It implies mind and force. No 'law' has any existence as a separate substance. Every 'law' of every kind and of every order of which we have knowledge is an expression of, and is found in alliance with, mind. The laws of the Universe are the method of mind expressing itself in orderliness."

No scientist has ever defined law in that fashion. It is a definition which only a theologically trained thinker could have framed. It would have been impossible to put a more inaccurate interpretation upon the phrase, "the laws of Nature." A natural law does not necessarily imply mind, nor is it an expression of, or always found in alliance with, mind. To a man of science the theologian's language conveys no meaning whatever. By the laws of Nature the physicist merely understands Nature at work. All her forces, so far as we know, are physical and chemical, and she is absolutely under their dominion. This may strike "a trained thinker" of Mr. Spurr's order as grotesque and false; but can he conceive of Nature's processes as being different from what they are? Are they not irresistible, and can he prove that they are not automatic? It is true that our knowledge of the Universe is extremely incomplete; but it is also true that we have discovered two great laws, namely, those of the indestructibility of matter and the conservation of energy. These two laws, the one chemical and the other physical, are of universal application. The sum total of matter and force has never varied. Even Sir Oliver Lodge is scientifically orthodox on this point, though the great physicist, when speaking upon non-scientific subjects, enables the theologians to claim him as an ally.

Mr. Spurr is entirely mistaken when he asserts that "the mechanical conception of the Universe has gone by the board." It has done nothing of the kind, and we challenge the reverend gentleman to prove his wild assertion. He seems to be in the habit of hurling false statements at the public. About a year ago he confidently announced the overthrow of Rationalism by the War. As a matter of fact, Freethought literature was never in greater demand than it has been since the War began; and wherever Freethought lectures are delivered they are listened to by eager crowds. It is an undeniable fact that the circulation of some Rationalist organs is larger now than it was two years ago. Equally false is the statement as to the renoucement of the mechanical conception of the Universe. Will Mr. Spurr tell us how many first-class scientists, who once held that conception, now disown it? Three years ago an important work was published, entitled *The Mechanistic Conception of Life*, by Jacques Loeb, M.D., Ph. D., Sc. D., member of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, Chicago, and it is well known that Dr. Loeb is held in highest esteem in the scientific world. As a sample of what is accepted

as sound biological teaching, we venture to supply the following extract from that book:—

"If our existence is based on the play of blind forces and only a matter of chance, if we ourselves are only chemical mechanisms—how can there be an ethics for us? The answer is, that our instincts are the root of our ethics and that the instincts are just as hereditary as is the form of our body. We eat, drink, and reproduce, not because mankind has reached an agreement that this is desirable, but because, machine-like, we are compelled to do so. We are active, because we are compelled to be so by processes in our central nervous system; and as long as human beings are not economic slaves the instinct of successful work or of workmanship determines the direction of their action. The mother loves and cares for her children, not because metaphysicians had the idea that this was desirable, but because the instinct of taking care of the young is inherited just as distinctly as the morphological characters of the female body. We seek and enjoy the fellowship of human beings because hereditary conditions compel us to do so. We struggle for justice and truth since we are instinctively compelled to see our fellow-beings happy" (p. 31).

That is the mechanical conception of the Universe, and it is held at the present day by hundreds of thousands of accredited scientists and thinkers. Mr. Spurr utters a falsehood when he says that "the vitalistic conception has returned in a new and better form, and alone holds the field." When the late Lord Kelvin made a similar assertion twelve years ago, several of the leading biologists came forward to give it the direct lie. Sir Ray Lankester said: "I do not myself know of anyone of admitted leadership among modern biologists who is showing signs of 'coming to a belief in the existence of a vital principle'" (*The Kingdom of Man*, p. 65). It is true that there is life in the ever-changing Universe, but there is absolutely nothing to indicate that "at the heart of it is God, who is alive and ever at work." Whatever the vitalistic principle may be conceived to be, and we know what a curious exposition of it is furnished by Sir Olivier Lodge, who is not a biologist, the fact remains that modern biologists have not returned to it in any form whatever.

Now the question is, Where does God come in, and what is there for him to do? Mr. Spurr teaches that he is above the laws of Nature, and can do what he likes with them. Such a proposition, we are fully aware, is theologically orthodox enough; but of its truth not a shred of evidence has been or can be adduced. It is easy to ask, "Is God a slave to his own laws?" but the real question is, "Has a single law of Nature ever been set aside for a moment? If not, what on earth is there for God to do? What need is there for a Being who never asserts himself at all? Mr. Spurr gives the reins to his pietism, and exclaims:—

"It is the glory of our time that it has come afresh to believe in a God who not only transcends, but who is immanent in his Universe. He is not outside his world. He works within it, and in that simple fact we have all that we need to make prayer a great reality. God is not blind, nor deaf, nor helpless. He is alive in his own world to all that makes for the interests of his sons and daughters."

How eminently worthy of the "trained thinker" that emotional outburst is! It may comfort some people to cherish such a faith, but there is utterly no ground in fact for holding on to it. We are in Nature's grip, and there is no possible release from it. We may entreat, we may aspire, and we may even despair, but she heedeth us not. The only condition of peace and happiness is implicit obedience to her laws, which are stern and immutable. But, as Meredith says, she has a heart of mirth, of which we are free to partake if we will. "God changes," says Mr. Spurr, "not his mind, but his action, for the express purpose of securing the completion of his plans menaced by an abuse of human liberty"; but Nature changes neither her mind nor her action, and it is with Nature, not with an imaginary God, that we shall have to settle accounts. The Christian forgiveness, as well as the Christian sin, is a myth, just as much as the forgiving God is a myth. Nature

knows nothing of forgiveness, and pity is not in her, nor does she ever show any favoritism. Each one of us must choose his own goal, and the route thereto; but we shall never reach it except by way of obedience, and we may be cut off before we are half way there. We are here as products of Nature's grim laws, but if our attitude to them is one of filial submission they will prove our never-failing ministers.

No, we do not know God for certain; we do not know him at all. Nobody knows him, though many imagine that they do. God is an object of belief, not of knowledge. But Nature we know as a positive existence, and she invites us to read and study her, that we may discover her secret. To know her is life, and in her communion is joy unspeakable and full of glory.

J. T. LLOYD.

Shelley the Sempiternal.

"The small clear silver lute of the young spirit
That sits in the morning star."

—Prometheus Unbound.

"Sun-treader, life and light be thine for ever!"

—ROBERT BROWNING.

It is related of Robert Browning that, as a young man, he one day passed a bookstall and saw a book advertised as "Mr. Shelley's Atheistical Poems, scarce." Badly printed, shamefully mutilated, these discarded blossoms touched young Browning to new emotions. This contact with the dead singer was the dawn of a new life to the clever lad. From that time Browning's poetic production began. The result is not surprising, for Shelley was one of the first singers of the century. To him song was natural speech. With labor, special education, and careful selection of circumstances, many have purchased their poetic rights, as the chief captain bought the name of Roman, but Shelley was poet born. He was the revelation of a new world; and it only wanted the remove of a century to show him in his colossal proportions.

So surely as Shakespeare is the first of our dramatic, and Milton of our epic, poets, so certainly is Shelley one of the greatest of our lyric poets. He had the voice of a siren, and his music is irresistible. Like Shakespeare, Shelley saw sylphs and fairies, and heard the ding-dong bell of the water nymphs, and he could turn from the witcheries of elf-land to the mundane realism of *The Cenci*. As generation succeeds generation, Shelley emerges as one of the great figures destined to immortality of fame. Many of his contemporaries who overshadowed him whilst he was living have almost faded into nothingness, but this Atheist poet has a message for unborn generations.

Long will it be ere the time when men shall no longer learn war, or live and move harmonious as the stars; long ere the human face radiates with love; but when a poet like Shelley sings of a golden age, we are all his willing slaves; for the poet lifts his voice in praise of high and noble things through the evil and dark days.

Shelley was well aware in what faculties he surpassed ordinary men. He knew there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of by pinchbeck politicians or tricky theologians, and which he did not dream of, but clearly saw and felt, and to the representation of which he devoted his extraordinary powers. Yet in this, his chosen field, he gave more of promise than performance. The *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Triumph of Life* are by no means the tide-mark of his possible achievements. He died whilst his magnificent genius was yet budding, ended by the treachery of that—

"Fatal and perfidious bark,
Built in the eclipse and rigged with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine."

Great, noble, and beautiful qualities met in this poet of poets. Splendid as his life-work was, he, the man, was greater. To the world he presented the

spectacle of a man passionate for truth, and unreservedly obedient to the right as he saw it. He might have lived a life of ease and indulgence. The aristocratic circle into which he was born would have honored him for it. But he thought continually of other matters. His antagonisms to tyranny, religion, and custom seemed criminal in the son of a nobleman of many acres. Society denounced him, for it had long agreed that all reform was a mad delusion. In such cases, indeed—

"Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neocera's hair."

There are valid objections to any attempt to construct opinions out of a poet's songs, for it seems like reading a story for its moral. Poems and novels should be read for their beauty and vitality. Yet it is impossible to leave Shelley without referring to his opinions. Literature was not a pastime with him. There was a close connection between his writings and his life. Shelley was ever a pioneer. From the days of *Queen Mab* to his last poem, he was fighting for liberty. Except that the later poems strike deeper chords than those he had used with such exuberant resonance in his youth, there is no change. His Atheism was never disputed during his unpopular days, but when it was discerned that the star of a great poet had arisen, he was impudently dubbed a Christian. Florence to the living Dante was not more cruelly unjust than England to the living Shelley. Only some thirty years after Shelley's death was his poetic glory truly acknowledged. And even at the Centenary celebration at Horsham, most of the speakers discreetly emphasised his claim on the county families.

Out of the charnel-vault of social corruption which preceded the great Revolution, Rousseau saw in vision the ideal society of the future. Of this new world Shelley is the poet. It was precisely because his heart was aflame with human sympathy that his poems have vital and permanent effect. Shelley devoted himself to the idea of the perfectibility of human nature. It is the very mainspring of his poetry. In his finest poems its expression glows with the solemn and majestic inspiration of prophecy. He dazzles us with glories beyond our reach, making us yearn for that which seems unattainable, and we are entranced by the grandeur of his dream-pictures of an emancipated humanity. What Shelley might have been we cannot conceive. At the age of thirty he was drowned in the sea he so loved. His ashes lie beneath the walls of Rome, and "Cor Cordium" ("Heart of Hearts") chiselled on his tomb, well says, what all who love Liberty feel, when they think of this Atheist poet.

"O heart whose beating blood was running song,
O sole thing sweeter than thine own songs were,
Help us for thy free love's sake to be free,
True for thy truth's sake, for thy strength's sake
Till very liberty makes clean and fair [strong,
The nursing earth as the sepulchral sea."

MIMNERMUS.

The Evolution of Sea Power.—II.

(Continued from p. 791.)

TEN years after Lepanto's famous sea fight a charter was conferred by Elizabeth of England upon the English Levant Company. The State had recognised the existence, and now agreed to regulate a trade that had been developed by English merchants in the Mediterranean by their own independent efforts. The great pioneer, however, in this departure was a man of another race. Under the celebrated Prince Henry of Portugal, the expeditions of his captains along the coast of Africa led to important geographical discoveries in that region. The Portuguese had penetrated to the south as far as Senegambia when the Prince died in 1460. Colonies were formed both on the islands and the adjacent shores. Free from competition, these pathfinders

were clearing the way for the subsequent triumphs of later voyagers. They materially helped to rob the ocean of its terrors, and accustomed Europe to the thought that the vast waters were not insurmountable barriers, but were open to the dominion of mankind.

After a prolonged struggle with prejudice and religious superstition, the Italian Columbus at last persuaded Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain to permit him to justify his theories in 1492. Curiously enough, this fearless navigator lived and died in the belief that he had reached India by constantly sailing to the West. That he had discovered a new continent remained to be proved by later explorers. By the close of the fifteenth century, however, Vasco da Gama, by following the routes discovered by the earlier Portuguese, had sailed round the Cape of Good Hope and actually landed in India. These two remarkable enterprises represent landmarks in the history of human achievement.

Owing to economic, geographical, and political disadvantages, other nations were unable for a time to participate in the splendid fortune which had fallen to the Spaniards and Portuguese. Italy was battling for her life with Austria. The Turks were harassing and enfeebling Venice. France was rent by domestic dissensions. England was unprepared for action. With the Holy Father, Pope Alexander VI. as arbitrator, the contending claims of Spain and Portugal to rule and exploit their newly acquired territories were adjusted. It was agreed that Spain was to possess all the lands lying to the west—

"of a meridian which strikes the coast of South America at the mouth of the Amazon, and from thence westward to the corresponding meridian in the eastern hemisphere. Whatever Spain did not claim as hers to discover, and to dominate, fell to Portugal."

This happy arrangement was not seriously infringed for quite a hundred years. Ambitious and desperate adventurers, some possessing great names in the history both of France and England, were, it is true, engaged in laying the foundations of the coming conquests of their countrymen. But the Iberian Powers, on the whole, suffered even less from the attentions of their enemies than the British Navy and mercantile marine have suffered from the Germans during the present War. Despite all her defeats on land and sea, and the religious blight which descended on her people, Spain maintained her hold on her Western possessions right down to the opening years of the nineteenth century.

The Hansa cities controlled the trade of the North, and England, while striving to secure a road to the East along the north of Asia, managed to gain part of the commerce with Russia, which had hitherto been monopolised by the Hansa League. This took place under the early Tudor kings, and in the reign of Elizabeth the privileges enjoyed by the Hansa agents at the London steel-yard were abolished, and England prepared to enter into her heritage on the sea.

The commercial prosperity of England gathered strength under Henry VII. and his son. These two sovereigns have been the subject of serious reproach, but Henry VII. was a statesman of no mean ability, and Henry VIII., albeit a masterful, and perhaps cruel man, displayed considerable discernment in the choice of his ministers. Both these monarchs furthered the interests of the Navy, and secured its efficiency by creating a sensible system of naval administration. A national Navy came into being, directed by a central authority. The naval administration of Henry VIII. was a system which governed the evolution of English seamanship up to almost the middle of last century.

But the supremacy of the Spaniards and their neighbors in the Eastern and Western worlds was accompanied by the rise of a sea power in Northern Europe that was destined to exercise an immense influence on future maritime affairs. The assassination of William the Silent served to more securely cement the union of the Northern Provinces of the Netherlands, and the Dutch people were now more

firmly resolved than ever to cast away the Spanish tyranny. The rebellious Netherlands grew more and more successful, especially on the sea. The Hollanders who scorned to bow to the bitterness and insane bigotry of Philip II. were even more recalcitrant to Philip III. When, in 1609, the last-named king was compelled to agree to a twelve years' armistice to Holland, the Dutch rebels had become the rulers of the waves, and had secured a firm footing in India, in which peninsula they had built up a powerful empire by the founding of their East India Company in 1602.

Throughout the seventeenth century the Hollanders displayed their greatest intellectual and material achievements. Their ships rode over every sea, and they became the chief carriers of the world's commodities. Amsterdam developed into a powerful and opulent city, and was justly regarded as the Venice of the North. The Dutch capital was not only a great port, but it grew into the flourishing centre of stockbroking and banking. It became the port of departure for the wealthy commercial fleets, and Tasman, Hudson, and many other celebrated explorers set sail from the famous city. The Dutch East India Company furnished Hudson with the supplies that enabled the English navigator to discover the waters that now bear his name.

In the North and Baltic Seas, as well as in the Channel, the Dutch came into collision with the expanding trade of Britain. Cromwell and Holland were engaged in naval warfare between 1652-54. Notwithstanding many brilliant sea-fights, the conflict proved indecisive. And although the Dutch, when the combat was renewed ten years later under our Charles II., sailed up the Medway and destroyed Chatham Dockyard, and even caused consternation in London, yet the war led to no definite result.

Holland strengthened her Navy, but devoted no care to her land forces, with the fatal consequence that when England and France united themselves against the Dutch, Louis XIV.'s marshals, Condé and Turenne, soon decimated the Dutch Army, although De Ruyter, their naval commander, kept the enemy fleets at bay and preserved his country from political ruin. The Treaty of Peace, ratified at Utrecht in 1713, signalises the close of Holland's career as a considerable European State. The seventeenth century was her period of transient glory; the eighteenth was the century of her rapid decay. The Dutch remain in many ways a remarkable race; they are enlightened and progressive; but as a political power they have long since ceased to count.

Had not religious animosity split the peoples of the Low Countries in twain a maritime State possessing a fair-sized territory and provided with a splendid seaboard and excellent ports might have seriously obstructed the maritime supremacy of Britain. Antwerp might then have become the leading port of Europe, or even of the world. It could have commanded all the sea-borne commerce of Central Europe, but the people were divided among themselves, and they completely failed to create and maintain that military strength which, unfortunately, proved essential to their protracted existence as a powerful State.

It was in the second half of the sixteenth century that the modern system of seamanship saw its beginnings. Vessels could now voyage all round the earth; sufficient food for long journeys could be provided, and their crews could be certain of a fair state of health. The ocean routes were opened with armed ships. The European races had found other worlds to conquer and to colonise. When Elizabeth ascended the throne of England in 1558, Spain had firmly entrenched herself in both continents of the western hemisphere. The Portuguese had possessed themselves of all the available territories situated between the northern and southern possessions of Spain in South America. In the East, Portugal had annexed a chain of islands extending from the south-east shores of Africa across the seas to Ceylon and the Spice Islands.

The English gazed with envious eyes on the wealth which America had brought to Spain, and they resented the claim of the Spanish Crown to a monopoly of the commerce of the West Indies. A storm was brewing, and its fury was intensified by the religious antagonisms of the time. The Netherlands were struggling to throw off the hated Spanish yoke, and had definitely committed themselves to the principles of the Reformation. With the accession of Elizabeth, England's allegiance to Rome was permanently broken, and it was now impossible to permit the despotic Spaniards to crush the rebellious Netherlands, for otherwise it would have been England's turn next to succumb to the arms of that powerful and remorseless people.

With the knowledge and, perhaps, with the connivance of the Government, spirited English adventurers carried the poor blacks they had kidnapped in Africa to the slave marts of America. This business was brisk and lucrative, but it was carried on in contravention to the sea laws sanctioned by the Spanish authorities. This smuggling of slaves was followed by expeditions conducted with the object of plundering the merchant ships of Spain. The trade routes were haunted by the vessels of speculators on the look-out for booty. The revenue of Spain was largely derived from the proceeds of the rich American mines, and galleons freighted with bullion were regarded as legitimate prey. Nor were these marauding exploits merely mercenary. No army can live without food and pay, and the finances of the Spanish Crown were in large measure devoted towards the maintenance of a large military force in stamping out the revolt in Holland.

One important object was to out off these supplies, and so successful were these endeavors that Philip II. was compelled to regard England as his most dangerous enemy, and the exasperated king determined to devote years of preparation in evolving that invincible Armada which was to reduce the insolent English to abject ruin. Upon the utter humiliation of Philip's magnificent naval armament we need not dwell. England was made safe from invasion, and precious time was given for her orderly development. Nevertheless, the naval power of Spain was still more than a match to the combined attacks of the Hollanders and English on her treasure ships and New World territories. That Spain experienced severe losses is, of course, true. But even in the last days of Elizabeth the attempts of the English, as well as the French, to establish successful colonies on the American seaboard all ended in complete failure.

Spain at this period possessed one overwhelming advantage over her competitors. She was the exporter to, as well as the importer from, the Indies. The Dutch carried on a considerable commerce with European Spain, and this favor was afforded them because their services were essential. English ships floating under the Scotch flag secured some business with Seville. In the circumstances it seemed advisable to turn to other trade routes. Accordingly, the Dutch and English decided to utilise the knowledge they already possessed of the paths followed and the cargoes carried by the Portuguese vessels on their voyages to the East. An Englishman, James Lancaster, in 1591-95, sailed into the eastern seas. This voyage was attended with acute suffering and a high death-rate among the crew, but it yielded a profit and it pointed the way. The Dutch speedily followed Lancaster's lead, and in a very few years their ships reached the East and appropriated a share of the lucrative trade of that region. This commercial success deserved encouragement, but it was difficult for two small States in far distant Europe to establish or maintain order among the medley of adventurers who were only too anxious to seek their fortunes in far-off seas. As a result, Elizabeth's advisers granted a charter to the "Governor and Company of the Merchants of London trading into the East" in 1600, while in Holland, in 1602, the Dutch United East India Company was formed by the consolidation of previously independent companies for foreign trade,

which were already furiously competing for the commerce of the Oriental World.

The Dutch merchants became an extremely wealthy community, and the English companies, while making a splendid competence for themselves, were, at the same time, laying the foundations of coming British ascendancy in the East. In the West Indies and in Southern America, both of the trading peoples of North-West Europe discovered that it was far more profitable to develop contraband commerce than to attempt to found colonies through conquest. They successfully planted themselves on islands and secured a footing on unclaimed mainland strips. New England arose out of a few coast settlements, and the French pioneers occupied territories further north. Thus, new markets were opened and trade was extended.

T. F. PALMER.

(To be continued.)

Thou Shalt Not Kill.

STANDING at the rim of the crowd, we listened for a while. The speaker was more than a preacher. He linked patriotic zeal to religious fervor. Summarised, his appeal might read, come to Jesus and be a soldier of the King. He was enthusiastically opposed to the Atheistic Germans. He desired to see them ruthlessly slaughtered. He wished a speedy end to their immoral unbelief; and this could only be achieved by a complete annihilation of the breed.

Certainly the man could use his tongue; but as certainly he could not use his brain. While the former worked overtime conscientiously, the latter slumbered peacefully. So soundly did it sleep, that I wondered if, by any chance, it could be aroused from its dormancy.

Public courage is not a strong part of my nature; and so I suggested to my companion he should ask the lecturer to define commandment. He nodded, with a grin; and I relapsed into the moral strength that silence is supposed to characterise.

At an opportune moment, when the man of many words was playing about something he named the inviolability of the commandments of God, and banging his Bible with an energy that could have been more patriotically expended, my friend chipped in with the challenge, define the word commandment.

Immediately the speaker ceased. The eternal springs of his verbosity suddenly dried up. His mouth opened and closed in a nervous fashion, and his arms fell limply to his sides. Slowly his brain awakened, and his lips seemed as if endeavoring to frame the word for utterance; but he was dazed, and the will was not so strong as the sleepy brain. And then, my chum, who, in many ways, is both irreponsible and irrepressible, spoiled the show by laughing.

Quickly the evangelist recovered himself, and poured forth a torrent of commentatory ridicule on people who could pass such an imbecilic remark. He won; but the challenge was not quite so freakish as he made out.

Commandments are commandments, despite what is said on the matter; and, when the Lord God Almighty is the commander, they are commandments, *par excellence*.

Reverence can best be expressed in obedience. Love does not question. Faith that permits of deliberation is hypocritical; and worship that countenances the least shade of suspicion is contemptible blasphemy.

When God laid a law upon the shoulders of man, I presume he knew all about its future. He knew every contingency that would arise. He saw the innumerable predicaments to which it would give birth. He comprehensively understood every dilemma, every contradiction, every absurdity that would ensue. He looked into the days that were to be, and observed in his invisible crystal globe that the brain he had given to man would, under his own guidance, twist, and turn, and apologise,

and excuse itself; would plead circumstances, natural weakness of faith, natural strength of infidelity; would even plead freedom of will in order to justify its blasphemous attitude. God saw all these things in the star dust glass; but God was not irresponsible; he knew; and he deliberately passed the commandment.

Nowadays, Christians know all this as well as God did himself; and how, then, is it possible for them even casually to suspect that God could be in the wrong? How is it possible for them, even when faced by the most dangerously tyrannical and murderous of circumstances, completely to negate their knowledge, their belief, their faith in the commandments of God? How is it possible for them to treat God as an irresponsible school-boy who speaks merely to enjoy the sound of his own voice? Surely it is disrespectful to the Heavenly Father. Surely it is unfair to his loving tenderness. It is not nice to treat him in so offhand a manner. Perhaps God can explain his children's disobedience to his most intelligible commandments. His children cannot.

Chamber's Dictionary informs us that the verb "to command" means to exercise supreme authority. The lexicon, however, is a twentieth century one, and its modern nature is evidenced when the Reverend Thomas Davidson expresses his opinion regarding the meaning of the phrase "the ten commandments." These are merely the ten *Mosaic* laws. God is omitted entirely. Moses was the sole culprit.

Erudite as the lexicographer may have been, his view does not coincide with popular religious ideas; for, even to-day, Moses is reckoned as God's great instrument; and, consequently, the ten laws would be better described as being God's commandments to man received by us through Moses. Davidson, perhaps unconsciously, was bowing to Freethought.

Commandments imply implicit and immediate obedience; and this might easily be proved to be socially and individually an evil. Emanating from mental subservience comes a tendency towards a decline in individual initiative. The readiness with which commands must be accepted occasions a development of mental laziness. Lacking the opportunity, or disparted from the necessity of personal thought and its corresponding action, the brain sinks into stagnation. Thought activity, under authoritarianism, becomes punishable supererogation. Recognising the uselessness of attempting to crystallise thought in deed, the brain degrades itself into bovinity. Love of self-expression, beneath the iron heel of the power to command, gradually abandons itself to indifference. Mental slavery follows, and with it a resuscitation of many little weaknesses that become huge obstacles to progress. Power to command, and power to enforce a slave-like obedience, from this viewpoint, are undoubtedly individually and socially dangerous, and may outweigh the value that is said to spring from them.

Republicans have used this objection to kingcraft, asserting that supreme authority, because it constituted a barrier to individual decision and personal judgment, was socially an evil.

Scientists revolted against the authoritarianism of priestcraft. Because a man was a priest was no guarantee of the truth of his opinions. Because he had enjoyed the use of fullness of social power in the past did not necessarily imply his conclusions were beyond investigation. Essentially, his decisive attitude was based on personal opinion or upon the social strength of a sect of the populace, and consequently was no more authoritative than any other passing opinion. Science silently ignored any authority but its own truth, and opposed strenuously, in its own calm way, all attempts to imprison it. The life-blood of science was freedom, freedom from all shibboleths, all powers, all restrictions; liberty, full and complete, to indulge its own activities. Authoritarianism, to it, was the Devil incarnate, the oppressing monster that would stifle and choke thought, that would crush and kill the freedom its nature needed. Freedom of thought is the first step towards emancipation.

Sociologists, too, have heartily condemned authoritarianism. The commandments of economic power and the commandments of machinery have both been vigorously accused of entailing a further enslavement of the mind of man. The industrial revolution, while it brought uncountable improvements that should have been socially valuable, completely killed, it is said, the initiative of the individual. The slave-obedience demanded by machinery deadened the mind. Monotony sent the brain to sleep. Mental stagnation produced an indifference that strengthened the power of the machine and the power of the owner of the machine. Lack of opportunity to assert the personality over the material successfully choked any desire towards self-expression. The joy of work, we are told, became the lifelessness of labor. Machinery inexorably commanded life, with grievous results.

And so one might plead escape from the devastating effects of mental genuflexion, so one might justify an attitude of opposition to the power of commanding. But with Christians no such attempt can legitimately be made. God is there to command, his commandments being the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Christians are there to obey, their duty being the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. A commander is of no use if he cannot obtain obedience; honor accorded him by servants who refuse their obedience is worthless tommy-rot. A commander who passes commandments, and accepts the grovelling insanity of laudation from blasphemous idolators who despise his counsel when it most practicably can be used, is contemptible beyond all verbal expression. Worshipers who reverently kneel around his footstool of grace, professing every ridiculous shade of veneration, every absurd joy of divine union, every ludicrous self-debasement that accompanies holy love, and yet simultaneously can deny and destroy, by absolute contradictoriness of activity, every virtue they love and praise, are equally contemptible, if considered superseriously, and, equally funny, if viewed sensibly.

Even into the terrible tragedy of war, Religion flings its grains of unconscious wit and humor.

ROBERT MORELAND.

Acid Drops.

A fair amount of discussion is still going on in the papers concerning the non-enlistment of the clergy. The Archbishops and Bishops still insist that the work of the clergy is of too great importance for it to be given up in favor of military service. We have already said what we thought of this claim, if it is sound it applies to many others beside the clergy, and if it does not apply to others, then the claim is sheer impertinence. But the striking thing is that the clergy seem to follow their Bishop's advice with the utmost cheerfulness. They are not forced to do so. They could enlist whenever they chose to do so, and no Bishop has the power to prevent them. And it is certain that if they defied their Bishops and enlisted, they could not be made to suffer for it after the War. They appear to be hiding their disinclination to enlist under the guise of devotion to religious duty.

Much ink has been spilt in the newspapers on the subject of War-time economics, and some wicked journalists have even suggested that the law officers of the Crown enjoy huge salaries which might be reduced. Some abandoned pressman may yet point to the salaries of the Archbishops and Bishops, which range from the modest sum of £15,000 of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the four-figure honorariums of the ordinary Bishops. Perhaps these saintly ecclesiastics will disarm criticism by voluntarily selling all and giving it to the poor.

From the Parliamentary report of December 8, we take the following:—

"Mr. Tennant, replying to a question, said he had no information as to the number of clergymen who had enlisted.

"Mr. Outhwaite: Is it not appropriate that clergymen should enlist seeing that there is nothing doing in Christianity? (Laughter.)"

Mr. Asquith should exercise greater care. Otherwise we shall have the Germans dilating upon the Atheistic House of Commons.

The Rev. John McKenzie wrote a very indignant letter to the *Daily News* protesting against Mr. Outhwaite's remark. He says that Christianity was never doing so much, and asks, "Who instills the conception of duty to which the recruiters so successfully appealed?" It is remarks such as these that make one almost despair of the intelligence of the clergy. What necessary connection is there between a sense of duty and Christianity? A sense of duty is born of social obligation, not of religious belief. We greatly prefer General Joffre's "obedience and love of country, that is enough," to the senseless cant of the British clergyman.

Lady Frazer, writing in the *Daily Mail*, suggests that everybody should do their own housework. What terrible heresy! Fancy the Archbishop of Canterbury cleaning the windows at Lambeth Palace, or the Bishop of London peeling potatoes!

The comic papers have dubbed Mr. Ford, the American pacifist, "the Peace King," and have turned their funniest writers loose upon him. The result is much pleasant fooling; but it is not half so funny as the efforts of the religious periodicals to associate "the Prince of Peace" with the "God of Battles."

The terminological inexactitudes of the clergy regarding the Atheism of the Germans are not being received everywhere with respect. The *Daily Mail* recently wrote of "the remnant of Germany's divines who have not yet abjured Christianity."

On the grounds of War economy, the Hitchin Guardians intend to deprive the workhouse inmates of their Christmas beer. This year the birthday of the Man of Sorrows will be celebrated with becoming solemnity.

A sceptic was talking to a clergyman in a railway carriage. "I cannot understand any man being so ridiculous as to disbelieve in a deity," said the minister. "It is not so strange as to believe in three gods," replied the sceptic.

Father Bernard Vaughan says the crime which the Kaiser has committed is that he has lost his soul, and the whole world was compelled to punish him. For our part we beg to observe that we do not care a brass button whether the Kaiser's soul is saved or lost, and in any case we do not consider the chastening of any man's soul is of sufficient importance to justify the turning of Europe into a shambles.

Mr. Clifton Redway, lecturing at Sion College on Saturday afternoon, said "it was a wonderful and almost supernatural thing that while religious edifices were shattered by shell-fire, the crucifix and the statue of the Virgin stood untouched and unmoved in almost every instance." In other words, a Roman Catholic or a High Churchman who prefers images to mankind, and not an Almighty and most merciful Father who loves mankind, and sent his son to die for them, who forbade images, is in control of the universe.

The utter absurdity of the Christian doctrine of forgiveness is illustrated by the Rev. Professor David Smith in the *British Weekly* for December 9. "God does not recreate," he informs us, "for the asking. The one and only thing he does for the asking is to forgive our evil past." Observe, God does forgive our sins for the asking, and yet he does nothing of the sort, because he forgave our evil past the moment Christ died on the cross. All that we have to do is to believe that we are forgiven. And yet if we do not believe, our sins hang over our heads, like the sword of Damocles, and are destined to destroy us for ever.

Merely to state such a doctrine is to fatally condemn it. It makes everything turn on belief or unbelief. It matters not what you are, or what you do, the moment you believe you become just in the sight of Heaven. No wonder thoughtful men and women turn their backs upon, and get disgusted with, such an irrational and immoral creed. No wonder Christianity has been a total failure in all the ages, and is seen to-day to be a greater and more grotesque failure than ever.

Professor Clow tells us that the War is one of God's crucibles. Having marked his people's faults and flaws, he puts them into this crucible. "In such a crucible as war he separates the precious from the vile, the pure from the foul, the false from the true, that he may bring forth his own to a finer loyalty and a nobler service." And this is the deity whom they call the loving Heavenly Father

and God of love. We wonder who are purified and refined, they who fall on the battlefield or they who survive, by this savage process of war! Can Dr. Clow tell us?

It is said by the newspapers that Mr. Ford, the American pacifist, addressed a telegram to the Pope, and by mistake wrote "Benedict VII." When too late, Mr. Ford learned that Benedict VII. died in the tenth century. Ecclesiastics are very stereotyped in ideas, so it would not have mattered much if the telegram had reached the earlier Benedict.

"We have come to such a pass," says the Rev. F. H. Gillingham, the cricketer-parson, "that clergymen are often requested to omit certain parts of the Marriage Service on the ground of their supposed indelicacy." "Supposed!" There is no doubt that Brother Gillingham knows more of cricket than he does of theology. We wonder if he reads aloud all the purple passages in the Bible.

What heroes the Bishops are! Dr. Bevan, Bishop of Swansea, has left for the Front to join the Brecon Territorial Battalion, where he will act as a chaplain.

Some critics have ventured to suggest that modern Christianity is an invertebrate religion. Some color is lent to this naughty suggestion by the fact that the Young Men's Christian Association holds chess and draught tournaments, musical competitions, French classes, employs brass bands and orchestras, and encourages football. Was Christ crucified in order that young Englishmen should learn French, or play draughts?

The *Leeds Mercury* publishes an account by a Corporal Noble of another "miraculous" escape. Every man of his Company, says Corporal Noble, was given a small crucifix and a rosary by a Belgian. Most of the men threw them away, others put them on, and amongst these latter was Noble himself. When, behold! after a "terrible battle," and the roll was called, every man who had discarded the emblems was dead, and every one who wore them was safe. The *Mercury* says that Corporal Noble's story "is reminiscent of the Angels at Mons." That is the most unkindest cut of all.

The *Daily News* gives prominence to a statement by the Bible Crusaders (the Society for advertising the Bible) to the effect that "a single really prominent advertisement in a popular newspaper," such as the *Daily News*, is the most effective way of reaching people. The commendation is of an evidently disinterested character. And we know that newspaper incomes have diminished owing to a falling off of advertisements. We wonder how many people interested in newspapers are members of the Bible Crusaders.

It was only to be expected that before long the folly of employing the same men seven days a week at ammunition-making would be discovered. Such a policy did not, and could not, make for more work, but for less work, and that of an inferior quality. If a man is to do his best for long in any direction, he must see to it that he has an adequate amount of leisure and rest. We are, therefore, not at all surprised to find that those responsible for the output of ammunition have realised that the seven-day week policy for workers is a blunder. The surprising thing is that it was ever attempted. A better and a larger view of the situation would never have set out on that line.

All the same, it is well to note the sectarian use being made of this by the religious. It is certainly an argument for a day of rest, but it is not an argument in favor of what they call the weekly rest day—meaning by this the prevention of Sunday labor. That is quite a different thing. There is no argument against Sunday labor that will not apply as against Monday labor or Tuesday labor—none, that is, except the purely Sabbatarian one. All that the State is called upon to do is to see that every man is guaranteed at least one day's rest out of every seven. But if that were done, we doubt if the religious press and the parsons would show any very keen interest in the matter. Their concern is, as usual, to reap sectarian advantage out of a national necessity. All they hope for is to revitalise a decaying Sabbatarianism under pretence of concern for the welfare of the working classes.

"The British wine trade blushes unseen," says the *Daily Mail*. The manufacturers of the wine used in communion services ought to be modest men.

A kindly Providence is not altogether absorbed by the European War. A telegram from Rome reports that Sicily has been swept by a cyclone, a hundred lives being lost, and the countryside devastated.

General Sir Francis Lloyd, speaking at a meeting of the Council of the Young Men's Christian Association, said that the Y.M.C.A. was "one of the discoveries of the present War." We had no idea that the War had been going on for so many years.

Twenty-four representatives of the Free Churches in Wales have issued a manifesto, in which they state that the British Army is fighting on the Continent to establish Christianity. We wonder whose Christianity it is that is to be established? Seeing that the Allies comprise followers of the Greek Church, the Roman Church, and all varieties of the Protestant Church—to say nothing of the Jewish, Mohammedan, and other religious soldiers—the task seems anything but an easy one. We imagine that to establish a Christianity that would command the approval of this miscellaneous lot of believers would be a harder job than ending the War itself.

The most recent recruit to the ranks of religious journalism is *Faith and Freedom*, edited, we presume, by the Rev. Walter Walsh, who has succeeded the late Rev. Charles Voisey at the Theistic Church. Dr. Walsh is a man of considerable ability and great Catholicity of mind, and, as is only to be expected, *Faith and Freedom* is superior to the ordinary religious weekly—we had almost written religious *weekly*. Dr. Walsh says that his aim is to make thinkers, not converts; a very laudable ambition, and at that we wish him every success.

But, thinking—that is, right thinking—implies the presence of sound, reliable data, otherwise the more accurately one's brain functions, the farther from the truth one is likely to get. And we would suggest to Dr. Walsh that the following passage from the first issue of *Faith and Freedom* needs careful amendment if his readers are to think profitably in relation to Free thought:—

"From one point of view the average religious man is much more a Freethinker than those Apostles of Negation who claim a monopoly to the title. The self-styled 'Freethinker' affirms that man is the mere creature of circumstance, controlled by his environment, and heredity, and limited to actions, which 'of necessity,' he claims cannot be avoided. This postulate, carried to its logical sequence, annihilates all power of freedom to act, and, 'of necessity,' freedom to think—for the argument 'of necessity' applies equally to Free-thinking as to Free-acting. Hence Free-thought so used is a misnomer, being impossible, and arguments of such 'Freethinkers' are as contradictory as any they attack on the Christian side. Free thought, in its highest application, enables us to soar with unfettered wings to Immortality. The self-styled 'Freethinker' denies the power so to think by negating the possibility and affirming that Death ends all."

This is quite ordinary, and altogether too reminiscent of the cheaper class of Christian Evidence attack. And it quite mistakes the real nature of both "Freethinking" and "of necessity." It is quite true that necessity—or, as we prefer to put it, the laws of causation—apply in mental as in material matters, and it is upon this fact the Freethinker bases his position. And just as freedom to move does not involve the removal, but implies the permanence, of those laws which determine physical action, so freedom to think implies the operation of determining conditions which are experienced in the principle of causation. There is only one meaning of "Freedom" in this connection, and that is persistently ignored by religious writers—hence the confusion. It means, not the absence of determining conditions—that is inconceivable; it means the absence of non-essential coercive conditions, and that is altogether a different thing. A man's thought is said to be "free" when his mental attitude is determined by the essential facts as he sees them, and not by carefully instilled prejudice, by fear of punishment, or by hope of reward. In that sense, even the religious man may be a Freethinker, but the odds are against him.

We do not know why it is claimed that "Free thought, in its highest application, enables us to soar with unfettered wings to Immortality." As rhetoric, it may pass; as argument, it is useless, and is mere dogmatism. And to say that the Freethinker, in disbelieving in immortality (he does not of necessity affirm that death ends all), denies the power so to think, is too cryptic for discussion. Finally, we would point out that man himself is one of the factors or circumstances that determine action. His separation from the general environment is pure artifice, necessary, perhaps, but artifice all the same. And it is essential to sound thinking to bear this in mind.

To Correspondents.

- MR. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—December 19, Portsmouth.
- D. CONNOCK.—Very pleased to know that your friends think the portrait of Mr. Foote such an excellent one. We think it the best he has ever had taken.
- C. ALMAN.—The copies of the *Freethinker* named are being reserved for you—at least, all that are still in print.
- "ONE OF THE OLD GUARD."—Thanks for information, which we reserve for future use if necessary. There is really no need to feel annoyed, though.
- T. CRANSTON.—Why should you try to answer every question a Christian cares to put to you? The first thing is to see if it is a question that ought to be put at all. Half the confusion in the philosophical world is due to neglect of this simple precaution.
- R. DANIELL.—Thanks for good wishes. We are "confident" in the sense that if endeavor will bring success we shall not fail. All the rest is for the future to decide.
- A. CHAPMAN.—We are interested and pleased to learn that you have not found your being a Freethinker has subjected you to any special hardship in your military career. This correspondent writes that he has always succeeded in getting N.C.O.'s and Orderlies who put him down as Church of England, under the head of religion, to alter it. We should be glad to learn that others have been equally insistent and equally fortunate.
- BABBADOES.—Cutting forwarded to Mr. Mann as requested. Other points in your letter noted.
- J. BYRON.—MSS. received, which we regret we are unable to use.
- J. DAVIDSON.—There is nothing wrong, or even discourteous, so far as we can see, in your publishing the letter. It is a matter of public interest concerning a public man.
- R. BLAKELY.—We find ourselves in agreement with some portions of your letter, but not with others—as you will, no doubt, have expected. But you must always bear in mind that the *Freethinker* is a distinctive paper, and that its distinctive character has made it what it is. And while we desire a large circulation, the attainment of this must be subordinate to the main purpose for which the paper exists. Thanks, all the same, for suggestions, one of which we had already decided on.
- P.—We are obliged. See reply to "One of the Old Guard."
- R. H. SIDE.—Shall be very pleased indeed to hear from your soldiers. Our best wishes for their safety.
- G. H. McCLOSKEY.—Many thanks for your help in the matter.
- J. B. PALFREYMAN.—We are quite assured of your respect for our late leader.
- MRS. EXNER.—We believe there are one or two Lives of Ingersoll published in America. The price of *Darwin on God* is 2d.
- R. W. DOWDING, in enclosing cheque for the Memorial Fund, writes: "I trust you will have a generous and ready response to your splendid appeal for a splendid object."
- G. CLOWES.—We know *The Present Truth*, and so far as we can see, its truthfulness lies for the greater part in the past.
- A. R. WILLIAMS.—Received.
- 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.
- 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.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 61 Farringdon-street, London, E.C.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon-street, London, E.C., and not to the Editor.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 61 Farringdon-street, London, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.
- THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months 2s. 8d.

Mr. J. J. Virgo, General Secretary of the London Central Young Men's Christian Association, says "soldiers crowd the huts to hear our lectures on archæology and literature." We wonder if the subjects of those lectures included the veracious stories of Solomon's temple, or the building of the Tower of Babel?

The Gospel message is no longer delivered as of old, and ministers rely on purely secular attractions to secure audiences. On a recent Sunday in London, these "extra turns" at places of worship included orchestras, magic lanterns, vocalists, and organ recitals. What Secularists these Christians are!

G. W. Foote Memorial Fund.

(To take the form of a Presentation to Mrs. Foote.)

WE publish below the second list of subscriptions to this Fund, and, so far, there is every reason to congratulate the Party on its response. If these two lists are an index of what is to follow, the result should be a very satisfactory one; we shall be able to close the Fund at an early date. There are many reasons why this should be done. Several other important things are awaiting attention, for which time and close attention are needed. But a Fund of this description involves a deal of correspondence, and, of necessity, uses up time that might otherwise be applied elsewhere. And to attempt too many things at the same moment is to qualify the success attained with each.

Our readers will, therefore, ponder the suggestion that those who intend subscribing should do so as early as possible. And for reasons other than merely financial ones, we should like the response to be as wide as is possible. Mr. Foote represented a national movement—or perhaps one ought to say an international movement—and we should like to see the list of names a very lengthy one. The Fund will then really stand as a national—or international—monument to his worth and work. In this respect we appreciate the names, and the area from which they are drawn, quite as much as the amounts subscribed. It is the spirit of the giver that counts for much in a memorial of this kind.

We publish a few brief comments from some of the letters received.

Mr. A. B. Moss, in enclosing contribution, says:—

I am pleased to send this slight token of my regard for our great dead leader, and for the many happy hours I have spent in his company when living.

Mr. H. Parsons sends cheque, with "very best wishes for a big success."

Mr. W. Wells writes:—

Mr. Foote's career is regarded by me with the utmost admiration and veneration. I regard him, indeed, as a "Savior of his race."

Mr. W. Mumby writes:—

I'm glad you are trying to make some provision for Mrs. Foote and her unmarried daughter, and hope it may be so substantial as to get them both an annuity sufficient to keep them from that "fear of want" which I believe Henry George said harried a man more than want itself. We are a poor party. There is no money in Freethought—quite the opposite; but if we all sufficiently realise our indebtedness to that brave, upright, and consistent soldier of Freethought, who suffered so much in person and pocket and position for the cause, then we shall see that the widow and daughter of our dear dead leader have some reasonable provision made for them.

One subscriber has furnished us with an expressive phrase. In forwarding his subscription, he says that he has much pleasure in inscribing his name on "the *Freethinker* Roll of Honor." That is a really good phrase, and has seized the spirit of the Memorial Fund. It is a Roll of Honor. It is in that spirit it was conceived, and we are glad to see that it is recognised as such. And here is our second list of names on the Roll of Honor:—

Previously acknowledged, £114 18s. 6d.—G. Shoults, £3 3s.; E. Lechmere, 10s.; G. Raggett, £1 1s.; L. Gjemre, £5; W. Feltrip, £6; Member of South Place Society, £1 1s.; Collet Jones, £1 1s.; F. W. Hall, £5; R. W. Blakely, £1 1s.; L. D. S., £1 1s.; L., 5s.; Mr. and Mrs. Harden, £2; E. F. Glass, £1; D. C. Drummond, 10s.; H. Good, £1; H. Tucker, £2 2s.; J. Bryce, 10s.; J. M. A., 10s.; C. F. Hall, £1; R. W. Dowding, £2; T. Griffiths, 10s.; Louis E. Wabbott, 7s. 6d.; S. Gimson, £5; F. Hicks, £1; Mrs. C. Shepherd, 2s. 6d.; J. G. Dobson, 5s.; J. Fitch, £1 1s.; S. Leech, £3 8s.; R. H. Side, £2; A. R. Wykes and Sons, 9s.; N. Duxbury, £2 2s.; A. Harvey, 10s. 6d.; J. D. Connor, 10s.; J. Davis, 2s. 6d.; J. H. Waters, 10s.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Cohen lectures to-day (December 19) at Portsmouth. His lecture is given under the auspices of the Portsmouth Sunday Lecture Society, but owing to the vagaries of the post or from some other cause, we are unable to give the name of the hall. Anyway, the lecture—"Christianity's Reign of Peace"—is a seasonable and a topical one, and local Freethinkers will doubtless be there in full force.

In the form of an "Open Letter to the Bishops of London, Croydon, and Willesden," a three column article appears in the *Morning Advertiser* for December 8. The "Open Letter" is an examination of the position that the Bible and Christianity forbid the use of alcoholic drink, and teach abstinence from them. The case is well argued, and is put with as great a fullness as is possible in the space taken up. We welcome its appearance in that place, as it will reach many whom the *Freethinker* is quite unable to reach, and will not encounter the same prejudice as it would have to meet in these columns. But we take this opportunity of pointing out that Mr. Foote's pamphlet, *Bible and Beer*, is still on sale, and the present agitation over the drink question gives it peculiar force. The price, too, one penny, adds to its effectiveness as an instrument of propaganda.

We are glad to learn that Mr. Lloyd had excellent meetings at Glasgow on Sunday last, despite the bitterly severe weather. These Glasgow lectures were, we believe, arranged as a kind of experiment in order to see how the public would take to anything not directly bearing on the War. We hope the experiment will have justified the continuance of meetings for the rest of the lecturing season.

From the December issue of the *Animals' Guardian* :—

"Mr. G. W. Foote, the editor of the *Freethinker*, who passed away in the end of October in his 63rd year of his age, was a sincere humanitarian, and thereby set an example to many of those who 'profess and call themselves Christians,' and who pray daily that 'they may be led into the way of truth.' Mr. Foote was born at Plymouth, in Devonshire, and was an able and cultured man of great moral courage and striking adherence to principle. Had he been a conventional thinker, that is, had he kept himself wholly apart from unpopular causes, his ability would have carried him very nearly, if not quite, to the front rank of public men. But there is a certain type of man who scorns public acclamation and who stands out boldly and fearlessly on behalf of the truth as he sees it. So G. W. Foote denounced conventional religion, denounced the exploitation of the poor and the needy, denounced the abuse of man's brutal power over the lower animals, and while the bulk of the world acclaimed the vivisectors, he threw in his lot with those who declared that vivisection was ethically and morally wrong and wholly unjust. Whatever else he was, G. W. Foote was a humane, a just, and a merciful man. He was also a fearlessly honest man, and in this world there is ample room for these virtues."

And this from a Barbadoes paper, the name of which did not accompany the cutting :—

"IN MEMORIAM.

GEORGE WILLIAM FOOTE.

Editor-Proprietor of the *Freethinker*.
Died in London, October 15, 1915.
Cremated Thursday, October 21.

He was one of the oldest and most vigorous of Freethought leaders. President of the National Secular Society and Secular Society, Limited. Throughout the civilised world the fallen Freethought leader will be honored and revered."

Our readers will be interested in the following from Miss Eva Ingersoll to Mrs. Foote :—

"We were greatly shocked to hear of the death of your distinguished husband. We had earnestly hoped that he was on the road to recovery, and would live for many years to continue his splendid work for Freethought. Our admiration for his brilliant intellect, his wonderful courage, and true nobility of character was very real, and we mourn his loss to our cause and to ourselves. With assurances of the deepest sympathy of the entire Ingersoll family,—I am, faithfully yours, EVA A. INGERSOLL."

Mr. R. W. Chainey, Treasurer of the Paine Memorial Corporation, also writes, through Miss Vance, that—

"The world owes G. W. Foote a debt of gratitude for his unflinching fidelity to right in face of great obstacles, much venom, and vindictive spite; for his adherence to principle, his devotion to truth, and for his sturdy blows in breaking the way for future generations."

Historical Value of the Gospels.—V.

(Continued from p. 797.)

It is not necessary that any one of these hypotheses should be true. They are only a few of many conceivable explanations of a circumstance which, from the nature of the case, must after thirteen centuries remain enigmatic.

It remains for us now to trace so much of the history of the Christian Church, during the first century of its existence, as will enable us to throw light on tendencies which may have assisted in the development of the Gospel legends into their present shape.

Our principal authority for the history of the first generation of Christians is the apostle Paul. It is possible from his letters (excluding the spurious epistles to Timothy and Titus) to construct a workable picture of the development of the Church during the thirty years following Jesus' death. The work called the "Acts of the Apostles," which was composed by "Luke" soon after the third Gospel, dates from a century later than the events recorded, and though the author seems to have used at least one contemporary document, his account differs very materially from that which is given in Paul's Epistles.

Of the few years immediately following the crucifixion we know very little. The disciples of Jesus, probably a few hundred in number, constituted a small band of unlettered fanatics, who lived in a state of continual religious excitement and expectation of an early return of Jesus to earth. They lived a communistic life apart from worldly ties, sharing common meals, and devoting themselves to visions, prayers, preaching, and that curious and morbid manifestation described as "speaking with tongues," a kind of inarticulate babbling which is not unknown among eccentric sects at the present day, but which was attributed by believers to the inspiration of the "Holy Spirit." Apart from these peculiarities, the disciples continued to be strict Jews, and had no thought whatever of founding a universal religion.

It was the advent on the scene of Paul of Tarsus which gave a new impetus to events. Paul, the second founder—one might more justly say, the real founder—of Christianity, was one of those ill-educated and emotional, but fanatical and masterful men, like Mahommed and Luther, who are usually able to make a success of a new supernatural religion. Although a pure-blooded Jew, and sharing in the current Pharisaical beliefs as to a coming resurrection, to be followed by judgment and eternal happiness or misery for all men, Paul had grown up in the mixed society of Asia Minor, where the downfall of civic independence had been followed by a welter of competing mysticisms and superstitions—Judaism, Mithraism, the worship of Isis, the worship of Cybele, etc.—each of them professing to offer a recipe for personal salvation beyond the grave. Arriving in Judæa soon after the career of Jesus had terminated, Paul was at first disposed to regard his disciples as noxious heretics to be extirpated by the strong arm. He was himself, however, dissatisfied with Judaism, and was seized by the idea of using the legend of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as a peg on which to hang a new universal religion, of which he would be the apostle. He is careful to inform us in his epistles that this new religion was in no way derived from anything which the actual disciples of Jesus may have told him, but "came to him through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. i. 12). In other words, it was evolved from Paul's inner consciousness. The essence of this new religion was the dogma that God had condemned all mankind to hell-fire as hopeless moral failures, but would pardon those who would embrace salvation by believing in Jesus as the Messiah or Christ, and as risen from the dead. This new revelation was claimed by Paul to have abrogated all the old Jewish ceremonies, particularly that of circumcision, as of

no value whatever for securing this pardon or "justification."

We have seen that the original disciples of Jesus had not in the least contemplated the foundation of a universal religion. When, therefore, Paul gave out that he had been commissioned by Jesus in a vision to preach this doctrine to Jews and Gentiles alike, and proceeded, in the course of the next twenty years or so, to found churches in Syria and Asia Minor on this basis, an open breach developed between him and the strict Jewish Christians of Judæa. A compromise was patched up at Jerusalem, but evidently did not last long, as very soon after A. D. 50 we find acrid disputes raging through all the Christian churches between those who upheld the validity of the Jewish law, and the exclusive authority in the church of the twelve apostles, and those who maintained Paul's apostleship and the reality of his revelation. (See the Epistle to the Galatians, and 2 Cor. 10 to 13.)

Paul himself probably perished in the persecution of Nero (A. D. 64). By the time Mark's Gospel was written, ten or twenty years later, the acute stage of the conflict between the Pauline and Jewish conceptions of Christianity was probably past. There is reason to think that a temporary solution was found in the establishment of two church-organisations in every place, one for Jewish converts, owning the authority of the twelve apostles, and one for Gentile converts, owning the authority of Paul.

The conflict, however, had developed high passion on both sides, and there can be no doubt that both parties fabricated "sayings" of Jesus in support of their particular views, some of which have found their way into the Gospels. The Jewish party, for example, who wished to insist on the inferior position of the Gentile converts, invented the story of the Gentile woman who had besought Jesus to cast a "devil" out of her daughter, but had received the reply, "Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs." To which she answered: "Yea, Lord: even the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs." Whereupon Jesus was said to have consented to heal her daughter. Again, by way of proving that the Jewish law was still valid, the saying was circulated, "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness [i.e., "your attention to the law"] shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." Harsher sayings still were invented and circulated by the Jewish Christians against the disciples of Paul. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the swine, lest haply they trample them under their feet, and turn and rend you" ("dogs" meaning the Gentiles). Again, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in thy name, and by thy name cast out devils, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (literally "lawlessness"—an allusion to the Pauline party).

The Pauline Christians retaliated by inventing and circulating many "sayings of Jesus" of an opposite tendency, execrating the Jews and all their works, and praising the Gentile converts by contrast. They alleged that Jesus had healed the slave of a Roman centurion, and had commended the centurion in these terms: "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and

gnashing of teeth." So, too, the parables of the prodigal son, and of the nobleman who received a kingdom in a far country, but whose own subjects rebelled against him meanwhile and were slain for it (Luke xix. 12-27), may have been put into circulation by the Pauline party as apologues against the Jews.

After the Pauline-Jewish controversy, the next great source of spurious sayings attributed to Jesus was, without doubt, the calamity of the Jewish rebellion and the destruction of Jerusalem (A. D. 66-70). On the outbreak of the war, the Jewish Christians removed themselves in a body to the lonely town of Pella, across the Jordan, where they continued until after the siege. To persuade the members of the brotherhood to this step, explicit prophecies were fabricated and put into the mouth of Jesus. It was pretended that he had left definite directions as to the course his followers were to take when the Roman invaders appeared. (See Mark xiii. 14-23; Luke xvii. 22-37) We have already seen that these calamities were interpreted at the time, by Jewish Christians, as the signs of the impending return of Jesus. The Book of Revelation was almost certainly composed at this date, and in that strange work it is explicitly stated that three-and-a-half years are to elapse between the destruction of Jerusalem and the deliverance of the Church. (Rev. xi. 2, and xii. 14. In the latter passage the "woman flying into the wilderness" is the Jewish Church taking refuge at Pella.) This prophecy of the end of the world, like other similar prophecies, ancient and modern, was falsified; but as in other cases, the failure of the prophecy to materialise seems in no way to have affected the boundless faith of those to whom it was addressed.

ROBERT ARCH.

(To be continued.)

The Fascination of Mystery.

THE childhood of the race and the childhood of the individual are alike dominated by the fascination of mystery. It is a commonplace of modern sociology that the superstitious beliefs and religious conceptions of savages had their origin in a sense of mystery, of wonder, and of fear, engendered by their ignorance regarding physical and mental phenomena. And no one who has had much to do with children will deny that the sense of mystery, a vague feeling of awe in the presence of the unknown, is one of the most noticeable characteristics of a young child's mental life. And, as in the childhood of the race, this sense of mystery forms the chief ground of superstitious beliefs; so in the childhood of the individual this same sense of mystery affords a ready means of implanting any kind of religious belief in the minds of the young. And the Sunday-school teacher who inculcates in a child's tender mind a belief in a mysterious God, who receives good children into a mysterious heaven, and sends bad ones to a mysterious hell, is taking advantage of precisely the same mental quality as is the ignorant nurse who tells of a mysterious Santa Claus who brings good children presents on Christmas Eve, or of a mysterious bogey man who frightens bad children in the dark.

The fascination which anything of a "mysterious" nature exerts on a young child is, indeed, very remarkable. My little daughter, aged seven, delights in asking me questions about nearly everything under the sun, and even beyond it, but her interest in the answers, though evident enough, is really inferior to the interest occasionally aroused in those cases where no answer is possible. That the fixed stars are glowing suns vast distances away from us, and that many of these distances have been measured, is interesting information indeed; but far greater in degree and very different in kind is the interest aroused by the statement that in the case of some particular star the distance is so tremendous that no man has yet succeeded in ascertaining it, and that it

may possibly never become known to human beings. A view of the moon through an astronomical telescope has caused intense delight and the young eyes have dilated in wonder at the scene, but this is as nothing to the awe-struck expression which greets the information that the opposite side of the moon has never been seen by human eyes, and that no one knows what it is like. Nor does the addition of a matter-of-fact statement that it, nevertheless, is probably pretty much like the side that we can see, do much to dispel the wonder—indeed, it is received with very little enthusiasm, for it only tends to spoil the “mystery.”

In the young this love of mystery might well be regarded as merely a childish trait, to be treated, like other childish traits, with indulgence in the expectation that it will disappear with maturer years. But, unfortunately, this expectation is not often fulfilled, for there are many adults in whom it is very strongly developed, flourishing most abundantly in the poetical and theological fields of thought.

In poetry the glamor of the mysterious plays an important, though not a supreme, part. There exists much sublime and beautiful poetry, into which no element whatever of mystery enters, but it cannot be denied that much other poetry, equally sublime and beautiful, is deeply permeated with it. Even Shelley has not entirely escaped the spell; for instance, take these lines from the opening passage of *Alastor* :—

“Mother of this unfathomable world
Favor my solemn song, for I have loved
Thee ever, and thee only; I have watched
Thy shadow and the darkness of thy steps,
And my heart ever gazes on the depth
Of thy deep mysteries.”

The three last lines seem clearly to indicate that the sense of mystery forms the main element of the poet's inspiration.

But—to go to the opposite extreme—Wordsworth is the poet whose verse is most deeply imbued with the spirit of mystery, and this is only to be expected, seeing that Wordsworth is the most “religious” of the English poets. Many examples might be given, but it will suffice to mention the well-known passage in *The Excursion* about the child holding the sea-shell to his ear :—

“And his countenance soon
Brightened with joy; for murmurings from within
Were heard—sonorous cadences whereby,
To his belief, the monitor expressed
Mysterious union with its native sea.
Even such a shell the universe itself
Is to the ear of faith.”

Doubtless the poet would have deprecated any attempt to enlighten the child by informing him that the murmurings he heard had nothing whatever to do with the sea; just as he would have disputed the statement that the sense of mystery inspired in some minds by a contemplation of the grandeur of the universe was only a subjective feeling, due largely to temperament and education.

But as mystery-mongers the poets are, of course, entirely eclipsed by the priests. To religion the sense of mystery is the very breath of life, and the farther back we trace religion, the more clearly do we see its influence. The priests of those old faiths knew well indeed how to play upon and utilise this universal frailty of ignorant minds. The Greek and Roman religions had their oracles and their auguries, the mystic methods and significance of which it was not given to ordinary people to understand. The Jews had their hidden rites, and their temple sanctuary separated from the vulgar gaze by an impenetrable veil. The Babylonian and Egyptian religions were mystic cults really understood only by the priests, the Egyptian hieroglyphics being, as the name indicates, a “sacred writing” which the priests alone could decipher. And, at the present day, Buddhism is pretty much on a level with these old religions as regards the restriction of its more recondite doctrines to the study and contemplation of its monks, most of the common people being quite incapable of comprehending them. Indeed, the esoteric character of the ancient religions was the

natural result of the social conditions under which they prevailed, when knowledge was the exclusive possession of the priestly class, and ignorance was the universal heritage of the common people.

Coming to Christian times, we find the tendency to mysticism soon making its appearance. The influence of Neo-Platonism, the esoteric doctrines of the Gnostics, and the strange cults of the Logos and the Trinity all show this tendency; while the elaborate cult of the Eucharist, which Catholics reverently call the “central mystery” of their religion, perhaps surpasses them all in setting reason at defiance and resting its claims to credence on its supreme incomprehensibility and transcendent mysteriousness.

During the Dark Ages, of course, mystery reigned supreme. In those days of faith and reverence the more incomprehensible and irrational any doctrine was, the more intensely was it believed, and supernatural explanations of physical phenomena were frankly preferred to natural ones. Indeed, the very devotions of the people were conducted in a language they did not understand—as they are in the historic Church even to this day—and were probably all the more fervent on that account.

The long and bitter conflict between science and religion has been essentially a conflict between two opposing tendencies of the human mind—the spirit of enlightenment which accompanies knowledge and the spirit of obscurantism which accompanies ignorance—the spirit which would light up the dark places with the lamp of reason, and the spirit which would prefer to leave them dark in order that they may afford a lurking-place for mystery. Every encroachment of knowledge on the domain of faith has been strenuously opposed as an incursion of the profane and secular into the territories of the sacred and supernatural. And whenever science itself calls a halt—confesses itself baffled at this point or that, or perhaps even retraces its steps along some rough and difficult path—how loud is the sound of rejoicing in the theological camp! Whenever some eminent scientist happens to confess that before some stupendous problem the human mind stands at a loss for an explanation—that here our knowledge has reached its limit, perhaps temporary, perhaps permanent—with what a glad psalm of triumph do the mystery-mongers hail the confession; just as though the existence of a limit to our knowledge of nature must needs imply the existence of something “supernatural” beyond that limit.

And not only are the confessions of scientific failure made the occasion of rejoicing, but at the present time we see even the triumphs of science being claimed by the theologians as, in some strange manner, affording confirmation of their mystery-mongering. The recent results of radio-physics, and those marvellous researches which seem to give promise of bringing the very primal constitution of matter within our ken are, by some curious freak of fancy, supposed to lend some vague sort of support to the belief in God, the soul, immortality, and what not. The explanation of this is simply that as science is entering on what seems to be entirely new and unexplored ground, the very fact of the ground being unexplored is a matter of rejoicing to those who love ignorance rather than knowledge. Anticipating the vast range of discovery which science has now to traverse in this new field; foreseeing the struggles of the human mind with the strange new problems which are about to demand solution, the mystery-mongers hug their mysteries the closer to their breasts and say, “Ah! here is a new land of darkness wherein we may easily hide our mysteries for quite a long time to come.”

The truth is that to the scientific mind there is no such thing as mystery in nature. There are gaps many and wide in our knowledge, there are boundaries and limits to our knowledge, some of which we may possibly never pass beyond, but there are no mysteries. That which is unknown to us to-day may be perfectly well known to-morrow, and even if the conditions be

such that it can never be known to us, the cause of this lies in the conditions only—in the nature of our own knowing faculty—not in anything “supernatural” (a really meaningless term) in the unknown existence itself. There may be many things which we, with our limited powers, can never comprehend; but these things are *physically* unknowable, not *metaphysically* unknowable, and it is in this imaginary region of the metaphysically unknowable that the “mysteries” thrive. When the inquirer after truth is confronted by any problem, whether it be an old one which has hitherto defied solution, or a new one which meets him for the very first time, he should either make every effort to solve it, or, if it be insoluble, try to find out why it is insoluble, and then leave it alone. In neither case is he called upon to kneel down in reverence and worship it as a “transcendental mystery.”

Philosophers themselves are in some degree to blame for this attitude. Even Herbert Spencer seems to have treated that metaphysical abstraction he calls the Unknowable with such profound respect as to give occasion to the mystery-mongers to rejoice exceedingly.

One is really puzzled to understand why it is that the ultimate or basal form of existence should be held to be deserving of a sort of honor and reverence not accorded to the other forms of it presented in the physical universe. Indeed, if we *must* ascribe grades of nobility to the various manifestations of existence, the ultimate form of it should receive the less, not the greater, honor. All evolution is regarded as an ascent from “lower” to “higher” forms of being. Mind, therefore, should be regarded as occupying the highest position in the scale of being, and the “Inscrutable Power”—the “Infinite and Eternal Energy” (to quote Herbert Spencer) should be assigned the lowest place.

Let us then rid ourselves of the shadowy fascination of mystery, and reserve all our reverence and awe for the sublime realities which shine resplendent around us in the light of knowledge.

A. E. MADDOCK.

Correspondence.

THEOLOGY AT SEA.

TO THE EDITOR OF “THE FREETHINKER.”

SIR,—The following extract from a letter I have received from a bluejacket on a cruiser “somewhere in the North Sea,” to whom I had enclosed a small parcel of Freethought literature, will, I think, interest readers of the *Freethinker*. “I like those leaflets you sent,” he says; “they have afforded something to interest us all in my mess, and led to quite a few discussions, as we have a bit of a local Bible-reader in among us, and your little lot has helped us to get a bit of our own back; for he is generally pulling us up to show us our faults. But we have him tubbed now.” It is quite refreshing to note the joy of my sailor friend at being able to put theological puzzles to the preacher. He also asks me to send more of the same kind. There is certainly no appearance of the “revival of religion” about this extract. On the contrary, it tends to show that if we could arrange for parcels of our literature to be sent to every mess on H.M.S. warships, it would find a welcome in most of them, if only as a change from the childish Christian literature that is supplied lavishly by Christian agencies. Jack is a thoughtful chap when at sea, with ample time to ponder over the problems of existence. At any rate, if our friends having acquaintances on warships at sea would purchase small parcels of our leaflets and pamphlets, and forward them, I think they would find, as in this case, that they would be much appreciated by our “lads in blue.”

VICTOR ROGER.

“A WELL-KNOWN FREETHINKER.”

TO THE EDITOR OF “THE FREETHINKER.”

SIR,—May I trespass upon your space to correct a small error in my old friend Arthur Moss's too kindly account of me in your last issue?

I was never a member of the Shoreditch Borough Council, and therefore must plead not guilty to the charge of having attempted to “secularise” some of the institutions of that

ancient borough” (which must be at least twelve or fifteen years old). As a matter of fact, I was for six years a member of the Finsbury Borough Council, although I consistently refused to ask any ratepayer to vote for me; and it may be interesting to your readers to note my one attempt to “secularise” the procedure of that body. It was customary for the mayor, aldermen, and members of the Council to occasionally attend services of local religious bodies “in state,” with gilt chains and rabbit-skin trimmings and top-hats and other symbolic things; and I steadfastly stayed at home. I gave notice of a motion to the effect that it was undesirable for the Council to take part in these functions, which were essentially in the nature of a friendly lead or collection-box fake. The then mayor asked me to call and see him, and he strongly urged me to withdraw the motion. This, of course, I refused to do; pointing out that the business of a municipal body was to look after municipal affairs, not to boom local religious enterprises. I offered to withdraw it, however, if he would ask the Council to attend in state a public meeting on behalf of the Freethinkers' Benevolent Fund; but he could not quite see his way to do that; so the motion was duly discussed in Council and ignominiously extruded, as I perfectly well knew would be the case. But I noticed that these ceremonial visits to conventicles became less frequent afterwards, and they may now have ceased altogether.

I only mention this for the purpose of suggesting to my brother (and sister) Freethinkers occupying a similar position that they might well go and do likewise.

GEORGE STANDRING.

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Many of the above-mentioned followers of the Carpenter of Nazareth have seats in the House of Peers, and are addressed as “My Lord.” “Blessed be ye poor!”

The Bishop of Bath and Wells, in an Advent message to his diocese, says: “The Archbishop is planning a great effort to arouse our people in the coming year. A mission is to be preached in not only the larger towns, but, if possible, in every village in the country.” Evidently, his Grace will not leave much room for the Rev. Billy Sunday.

The clergy are always telling us that stories first heard at mother's knee are never wholly forgotten. This is true; but rules of conduct enforced on father's knee leave a more vivid impression.

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Determinism or Free Will?

By C. COHEN.

Issued by the Secular Society, Ltd.

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Secretary—Miss E. M. VANCE.

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