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Liberty is the air of the soul, the sunshine of life.

—INGERSOLL.

Views and Opinions.

A Sermonic Deluge.

According to the Bishop of Chelmsford, there are 150,000 sermons preached every Sunday. As a bishop, he does not complain of the quantity. Like the young man who protested that he would not love the millionaire's daughter less were her wealth twice as great, the Bishop of Chelmsford would not grumble if 300,000 sermons were preached every week. His complaint is that the country is none the better for this sermonic deluge; and in this we quite agree with him. Multitudes of people listen to these sermons; they would miss them if they were not preached—one misses *anything* to which one has been accustomed; but for results, in the shape of value received for energy expended, one looks quite in vain. The utmost that the friends of the clergy can say with justice is that the listeners are not made worse by them. It would require a very sanguine person to assert that they received any positive benefit.

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What the Deluge Might Mean.

Still, there is something strangely attractive about these 150,000 sermons. If we reckon only thirty minutes to each sermon, they represent over eighty-five years continuous effort—presuming one man delivered the lot. If we assume that one man did deliver the lot, he must have started somewhere about the year 1500 to have finished by to-day. And think of what that would mean! He would have commenced while the earth was flat, and would have seen it grow round. Hell and heaven would have been, when he commenced, gross realities, and he would have seen both gradually dissipated into air. When he started preaching, witches and wizards, saints and devils would have been more plentiful than newsboys on the eve of a political crisis; and by the time he finished they would have become as great rarities as courage or sense in a congress of parsons. Placed on end, these sermons would have witnessed one of the most momentous changes in human history. From a world dominated wholly by theology, in which science existed on sufferance, and expressed itself with all humility, to one in which theology is only too grateful for every word of comfort or patronage thrown it by the high priests of natural science. There is a revolution here, at the side of which political or social revolutions are mere ripples on the stream of progress.

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What Might Be.

The saddest reflection about this weekly dose of sermons is that all this energy and eloquence might have meant so much that could have been useful and elevating. Let anyone consider what 150,000 enlightening discourses on any important subject might mean. Why, there is not a single problem that faces us which would not be

materially lessened in gravity in the course of a few months. Let anyone consider what has been done by a mere handful of men and women, without social prestige or financial resources, to educate the public mind in a few years on a variety of topics, and he will realize what the efforts of an army of men, such as the clergy, might produce if they were seriously interested in intellectual or social betterment. There is not an abuse that could stand for long against such an attack; not an injustice that would not soon be righted. It is often said in reply to the Freethinker that there are large numbers of good men among the clergy, that the black sheep is the exception. Let that be granted, and the evil only becomes the greater in consequence. Are the majority of the clergy intelligent men? So much greater the waste. Are they good men? So much greater the social wrong they do. If they were all rogues or fools one might pass them by, and look to the rest of the community to settle with social problems and with them. The real social wrong is that so many who are capable of useful and enlightening social work should expend their energies in preaching a gospel that is of no earthly use to anything or anyone.

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The Reverend Horatio Bottomley.

All preachers of sermons are not licensed parsons. The pose, and the position, is evidently attractive, and by custom the preaching of sermons is the easiest of tasks. In a lecture a man is supposed to say something reasonable and to offer intelligible proof of what he says. In a sermon neither reason nor proof is demanded. All you need do is to repeat the old things in the old way, making up in emphasis all that is lacking in sense. So Mr. Bottomley rising to what the editor of the *Sunday Pictorial* call heights of "spiritual inspiration" delivers his sermon in the shape of "Easter's Message to a world at War." Mr. Bottomley has caught the sermon-maker's trick of throwing words together that satisfies the religious reader by their mixture of impertinence and irreverence when addressing the unbeliever as in the following:—

To-day you and your learned theories grate upon my nerves. It is Easter, and if the sacred season makes no appeal to your soul—well, then you haven't one! Go down into the coal cellar, where you shall neither see the smiling countryside, emerging from the "Death" of winter, nor hear the love songs of the mating birds. Take with you a tallow candle and your books, and work out for me this problem—When did Time begin and where does Space end? *That* is more in your line—and when you have exhausted all the "solutions" that "Science" can offer you, and are still hopelessly bewildered, come out into God's sunshine—and leave it all to Him.

There is here quite the old sermon trick—the superiority of the spiritually illumined person over the benighted student of science and the folly of such a superior person coming down to the level of a mere Freethinker. But, Mr. Bottomley, it has been done much better than this. The hand of the copyist is *too* apparent. It would be far better to leave it to older and more practised performers.

Bunkum.

The message of Easter is "there is no such thing as death. That which we call by the name is Liberation—the liberation of the soul," and "I confidently assert that the risen tomb and the risen Christ are amongst the eternal verities of God." The theory of the resurrection, Mr. Bottomley concludes, consoles, inspires, helps, and explains. And as we have Mr. Bottomley's word for it, no other proof is forthcoming or necessary—save to such as are dismissed to the coal cellar with a tallow candle to work out conundrums for Mr. Bottomley's benefit. It is all very imposing—to the *Sunday Pictorial's* editor, who guarantees its inspiration. Others may be inclined to ask what are the facts that the theory of the resurrection explains? And how can the resurrection of a god explain anything so far as man is concerned? Suppose a god after being crucified rises from the grave; that may be a habit with gods, one would expect something out of the ordinary there. But how can that be any guide, or consolation to man, when, so far as we can see, a man once buried remains buried? This kind of verbiage may be inspiration to the editor of the *Sunday Pictorial*, to common people like ourselves it reads like pure bunkum.

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The Exploitation of Grief.

He is a poor parson, licensed or unlicensed, who does not in these days attempt to exploit the widespread sorrow that exists in the interests of his particular theology. Many thousands of people are to-day mourning the death of a husband, a father, or a son, and while religion brings them no special comfort, the preacher's pretence that it does so may be used to impress other people. And Mr. Bottomley, having assumed the parson's pose, naturally adopts his tricks. "These dear men," he says, "are not dead. Life is indestructible. The soul is immortal. This is not a tomb, but merely the forecourt of the temple of God," and so forth, and so forth. And this I say quite seriously, and quite emphatically, is the sorriest, poorest game of all. It is sheer exploitation of helpless sorrow. The very condition that should command sincerity of speech and helpfulness of action is seized as an opportunity for securing advantage. It is recognized that in normal moods the shallowness and worthlessness of such talk about empty tombs and forecourts of God would be at once recognized. It is hoped that in those abnormal moods which accompany a severe blow such dross may be accepted as pure gold. The Freethinker can at least pride himself upon the fact that in the presence of a great grief he has the decency to remain silent.

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The Sacredness of Sorrow.

For our part, writing as a quite uninspired person, silence is more befitting the presence of a great sorrow than vapid speech; or if something must be said, then words should be few, and marked by absolute sincerity. In the Freethinker's philosophy of life there is room for both the one who finds consolation in the repetition of religious formulæ and for the one who, recognizing how trivial and ineffective these are, sees in the calls of the larger social life the best help towards the surmounting of individual affliction. Sorrow is a universal fact with human nature, and man has learned to ace it in various ways. And strange as some of these ways are, they should secure our silence even where they cannot command our respect. In this respect, at least, it is the Freethinker who reads the religionist a lesson in courtesy and good feeling. The death-bed should be no place for the propagandist. In the presence of death the voice of controversy should be hushed, that the community of human interests in the presence of a sorrow that comes to all sooner or later may find expression. The grief

that has come to so many thousands of homes since the war commenced is not peculiar to religionists. It is experienced by all alike, and all meet it in ways that are determined by their beliefs, their affections, and their courage. The more shame that there should be men who do not scruple to exploit those whom grief has temporarily robbed of their defences, and in the interests of theories that would scarce commend themselves under normal conditions. The exploitation of death in the interests of superstition is surely the poorest game to which any man can lend himself.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

If Christ Had Never Been.

It is a notorious fact that Christian preachers submit themselves to neither questions nor discussion on the subjects dealt with in their discourses. This is why the pulpit is so often sneered at as the Coward's Castle. Originally the preacher's sole mission was supposed to be to deliver messages transmitted to him from the spiritual world, and the one duty of his hearers consisted in believing, appropriating, and utilizing every such message, while any discussion of them would have been the very height of irreverence and blasphemy. That foolish notion still persists in certain ultra-evangelical circles. The majority of preachers in our day, however, are painfully aware, and regretfully admit, that their sermons are their own imperfect and often dismally dull compositions, and represent their opinions about God in his relation to mankind, not God's estimate of mankind in relation to himself. Now, the preacher's exemption from public criticism naturally leads to carelessness and irresponsibility on his part. As his statements are never challenged from the pew, he yields to the temptation to enhance their effectiveness at the expense of their accuracy. In his eagerness to create an impression he exaggerates, forgetting that the interests of no true cause can be promoted by falsehood. As an example of such departure from the truth, we may take the last Monthly Lecture by Dr. Horton, published in the *Christian World Pulpit* for April 12, and entitled "If Christ Were Not." "If Christ were not," this preacher asks, "what would it mean for the world in which we live?" Here is his own answer:—

It is only when you think of it from the point of view of the possibility of losing it that you realize all at once that the only thing that holds humanity together, the only dream of a united world, a solid family of men, the brotherhood of man—the only dream of such a possibility all turns upon Christ being real, and if he were not the dream would be gone.

Surely Dr. Horton cannot be ignorant of the fact that the brotherhood of man, or the solidarity of the race, is by no means a dream dependent on the reality of Christ. It is rather a dream that antedated the Gospel Jesus by many centuries. The Stoic philosophers never ceased to talk about brotherhood, and so successful had been their teaching that in the Pagan Roman Empire "nationalities had been effaced," the idea of universal humanity having "disengaged itself from that of nationality." No honest student of history can conscientiously regard brotherhood as a dream that "all turns upon Christ being real," for he knows that "the Stoics had passed the word that all men were equal."

Dr. Horton gives his case away, however, when he speaks of "a united world, a solid family of men," as being still nothing but a dream. Christendom has never been united, religious sects have never been distinguished for their love of one another. Dr. Horton would not be permitted to preach in St. Paul's Cathedral,

nor would the Bishop of London consent to officiate at Lyndhurst Road Congregational Church. Have not the Unitarians been refused inclusion in the Council of Evangelical Free Churches? Dr. Horton maintains that the dream of brotherhood is the only thing that keeps humanity together, and yet he knows very well that it fails to hold even Christian Churches together. This is the state of things after nineteen centuries of the Christian religion. Instead of facing this ominous fact, the reverend gentleman flies off at an emotional tangent, to lament the necessity, if Christ were not, of erasing the Christian epitaphs now found over millions of graves. He says:—

We should have to go to that peninsula of Gallipoli, where so many have been laid to rest, and where as you know, the soldiers have put little crosses over the lonely graves, and scratched names and inscriptions—the cross to signify that they are buried there in hope. We should have to go to every one of the graves of those who have fallen in the carnage of the last two years and wipe out every word that spoke of immortality. When you come to reflect upon it you find that the name of Christ is the one thing that helps us to bear the loss of those we love, and is the one hope of those who die. If Christ were not, hope would be gone.

Here again the reverend gentleman, no doubt unconsciously, prevaricates. There are hundreds of Atheistic homes in London to-day wherein parents and children are held together, not by the charm of the name of Christ, but by the bond of earthly affection, and wherein the loss of loved ones is borne with heroic fortitude, and in the complete absence of any supernatural consolations. Has Dr. Horton ever visited such homes and witnessed the behaviour of the inmates under bereavement? If he had, he could not honestly have uttered the lying extract just given. So far as these homes are concerned, Christ is not, and yet their outlook upon life is as cheerful and joy-giving, and their anticipation of death as fearless and serene, to say the least, as those of the most Christian homes in the land.

Dr. Horton is obsessed with the thought of death, and cannot extricate himself from it. He cannot get away from the graves. There he stands, and unhesitatingly declares that "even for the brightest and most hopeful nature the very light of the world goes out if the grave is the end." Such an utterance is absolutely false, as thousands of men and women who have repeatedly stood by open graves are able to testify. Spinoza was in a much healthier frame of mind when he wrote the following sentence, which ought to be printed in golden letters:—

The free man thinks of nothing so little as of death, and his wisdom is a meditation, not of death, but of life.

The sick-bed and the grave are Dr. Horton's favourite topics. They seem to fascinate him. The death-beds he visits are evidently those of professing Christians and backsliders. He is not likely to be ever invited to the death-bed of a genuine Freethinker; and yet he talks as if he went to the death-beds of unbelievers almost daily "to find how few there are who can dispense with Christ on the death-bed, and how many there are who have denied and doubted and opposed him through long years of life and at the end reached out their hands to him."

After quoting Michael Angelo's famous sonnet on death, Dr. Horton proceeds to show that "if there is no Christ to whom the heart of man can turn, sculpture and painting and art are vain, and all those dallying thoughts of human happiness and even human love may be as well dismissed, for they are meaningless, they are merely trifling lights along a road that leads to eternal darkness. Coming from a classical scholar the allusion to sculpture and painting are totally unintelligible, because he must

admit that the best art the world has ever seen flourished in Pagan Greece. Has Phidias ever been surpassed? Besides, to aver that all thought of human happiness and love in pre-Christian times were meaningless, and are meaningless now if there is no Christ, is to betray the most stupid and hardened prejudice. Is it conceivable that there are no joys of life in non-Christian countries, that all the civilized nations of Heathendom experience no pleasure or enjoyment of a worthy and noble order? Dr. Horton seems to think that nothing is worth having unless it bears the name of Christ. It is easy enough to describe the infidel orator in the parks and open spaces in contemptuous language as he cries out, "with derision and apparent gratification, that now Christianity is disproved and Christ cannot be real, because there is a great European War"; but it is a radical mistake to say that Christianity must be given up because the world has failed to obey its commandments. Christianity is being given up because Christ has signally failed to win the world, or because existing Christianity is seen to be a screaming farce.

Dr. Horton reiterates the present popular fallacy that Christ has not yet taken possession of mankind. That ideal time is still to come. We hold that the Christ who has vainly attempted for two thousand years to draw the world to himself is a discredited Christ and ought to be dispensed with. According to the reverend gentleman, Christ has got down beneath the surface of things, but is about to emerge from the tomb once more. Matthew Arnold was much nearer the truth when he sang:—

Far hence he lies
In the lorn Syrian town,
And on his tomb, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down.

A more appropriate title for a sermon just now would be, "If Christ had never been, what would it have meant for the world in which we live?" For one thing the Church would never have sprung into existence. The Church is at once the creation and the creator of the Christ. This is candidly admitted by many of the New Theologians, who openly teach that Christ is not an historical character, but a person brought into being by the theological imagination. The men who drew him in outline formed the nucleus of the Church, and ever afterwards the Church and the Christ fought and grew and prospered together, and now at last they are both waning and fading and dying together. But if neither had ever been, we would have been spared all the bitter contentions and controversies, all the warring parties and factions; all the bloody persecutions, the brutal Spanish Inquisition, hundreds of savage wars, millions of family quarrels and divisions, and countless social and economic disabilities and malignant disaffections, of which we mournfully read in ecclesiastical histories, whether written by Catholic or Protestant authors. Had neither ever been, science would have been a thousand years ago fully as far advanced as it is to-day, and the uninterrupted spread of education and knowledge would have obviated many a conflict, averted many a war, settled many a difference, without recourse to physical force, and peace and prosperity would have reigned everywhere long ere now. Dr. Horton informs us that Christ is now in the tomb. We do not quite agree, but we are firmly convinced that the tomb is his final destination.

J. T. LLOYD.

"A country clergyman" writes to a daily paper to protest against the tax on motor-cars, which he says will render many parsons "unable to fulfil their duties adequately." We suggest that they should try the services of the animal on which their master entered Jerusalem.

Shakespeare and Democracy.

To bear all naked truths,
And to envisage circumstance, all calm ;
That is the top of sovereignty.

—Keats.

Was Shakespeare a Tory or a Democrat? Many critics have attempted an answer to this momentous question, but in nearly every case according to their own political leanings. Mr. Bernard Shaw, in company with the *Daily Mail*, shares the opinion that Shakespeare was a hidebound reactionary in politics, and many Socialists have echoed the same views.

Professor Brandes speaks of his anti-democratic bias; Hartley Coleridge considered he was a Tory. To Lord Morley he is a Feudalist, and to Mr. William Archer he is an aristocrat. Mr. Frank Harris finds that he was a gentleman, whilst the Conservative press hails him as a "sound Tory." On the other hand, Professor Dowden had doubts whether he should label Shakespeare "Liberal" or "Conservative," and Swinburne found that he was a Democrat. Amid this babel of voices the plays and poems of Shakespeare provide the only key to the Master's political sympathies, and the evidence contained in them should make clear what Shakespeare really thought and felt.

New light has been thrown on the subject by a thoughtful and well-written book from the pen of Mr. Edward Salmon, entitled, *Shakespeare and Democracy*, in which the matter is discussed without any of the sectional and party prejudices which have so frequently dwarfed previous examinations. Mr. Salmon's book is a genuine attempt to show that Shakespeare, as revealed in his works, was as superior to any mere party or class feeling as it is possible for a man to be, and that the great writer whose reputation is the supreme literary glory of the British Empire did not find ill alone in the meanest of his fellow creatures. At the outset Mr. Salmon satirizes the folly of tearing text from context in the plays, and the unfairness of fathering the views of his characters on Shakespeare himself. "As well," he adds, caustically, "might we make Shakespeare a murderer because he was the author of *Macbeth* or a lunatic because he wrote *King Lear*."

Shakespeare lived, Mr. Salmon reminds us, at a time when the monarch might claim divine right without being laughed at. He wrote in days when Democracy in its modern sense was as unknown as the aeroplane or the submarine. Shakespeare's detachment from the theological turmoil of the spacious days in which he played and wrote ought, in themselves, to supply a guarantee that he could suspend his judgment in matters political, no less than religious. Shakespeare has many messages for his countrymen, but few more valuable or more opportune than that party is a natural bane. That message is implicit, and to discerning readers, explicit, in his works, beyond cavil and dispute.

Sir Sidney Lee, to whose untiring industry in Shakespearean scholarship we owe so much, points out that the Master often states both sides of a question by various utterances placed in the mouths of his characters. This is a distinguishing mark of his mind, for it is few men who can do this, and still fewer poets. It was this extraordinary power of holding the scales firmly that caused John Ruskin to say that Shakespeare was not only unknowable, but inconceivable. The angry utterances put into the mouth of a man-hater like Timon, or the bitter outbursts of Coriolanus, do not prove that Shakespeare himself was hostile to the people. Nor do they make Shakespeare inferior to Milton as a poet, because Milton was a fiery Republican whilst Shakespeare introduces kings and princes among his puppets.

The plain truth is that Shakespeare stood for no class. He is the poet of all, rich and poor alike. He cannot legitimately be made to support the people against the noble, the sovereign against the subject. All may learn from him: the king the necessity for good government; the people that the kingly state is by no means a happy one. The statesman may learn that popular verdicts are unstable, and the agitator that order and contentment are essential to a country's prosperity. Shakespeare did think about political matters. He had opinions, but the artist was always stronger than the politician.

Shakespeare was quite democratic in his treatment of women in his plays. Indeed, he was far in front of his contemporaries in this respect, for he depicts women as being in every way the equals of men. The brilliant and witty Beatrice is more than a match for the smart Benedick, and Emilia holds her own against the villainous Iago. What comradeship, too, there is between Cæsar and his wife, and Brutus and Portia. What dignity in the welcome given by Coriolanus to his wife, quite in "the high Roman way." As Ingersoll says, "Shakespeare has done more for women than all the other dramatists of the world."

He had, too, a democratic dislike of men who "having before gored the gentle bosom of peace with pillage and robbery, make wars their bulwark." "How soon mightiness turns to misery" could be taken as a motto for all Shakespeare's historical plays. "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown" is Shakespeare's as well as Henry the Fourth's answer. Does not Richard the Second put a mine of poetical experience in brief space when he says:—

Sometimes am I King
Then treason makes me wish myself a beggar,
And so I am; then crushing penury
Persuades me I was better when a king.

Shakespeare's political detachment is shown in the words:—

Whiles I am a beggar, I will rail,
And say there is no sin but to be rich,
And being rich my virtue then shall be
To say there is no vice but beggary.

What searching criticism is in the passage:—

How quickly Nature falls into revolt
When gold becomes her object.

A similar idea is in the following:—

Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw doth pierce it.

And, again:—

Which makes the true man kill'd and scares the thief,
Nay, sometime, hangs both thief and true man; what
Can it not do, and undo?

These words, if written to-day, would be regarded as democratic. In an age when the poor had few rights, Shakespeare held the balance steady. The quality of justice was as little strained in him as the quality of mercy. The profound and intimate knowledge of men and women which went to the making of his matchless plays was not unmixed with pity, and he was great and good enough to say, "There is no darkness but ignorance." Shakespeare stands, not for Toryism, nor for Democracy, but for Humanity, which existed before all political systems and will survive them all.

MIMNERMUS.

The Hon. Mrs. Gifford, daughter of Baron Vernon, has been converted to the Moslem faith, together with her two sons. The local clergy will have screaming convulsions.

The Right Hon. R. McKenna says that those with incomes between £600 and £2,000 number about 250,000. The archbishops and bishops are in this group.

Modern Discoveries in the Heavens.

ON the first day of the 19th century, January 1, 1801, Piazzi, the Italian astronomer, discovered Ceres, a diminutive planet revolving between the orbits of Jupiter and Mars. In the following year Olbers detected another small body moving in the vicinity of Ceres which he named Pallas. Olbers propounded the view that these minor planets were the remnants of a larger body which had been segregated either by explosion or by the impact of a comet. This theory was favoured by Herschel, and that astronomer suggested the title of asteroids for the newly found bodies. A third asteroid was observed by Harding in 1804, and Olbers established the existence of a fourth in 1807. These were the minor orbs, Juno and Vesta.

No more asteroids were noted until 1845, when Hencke proved the presence of another. From that date these wanderers have been constantly discovered, and over 400 planetoids journeying round the Sun in the spaces between Mars and Jupiter are now known to science. The majority of these bodies are so tiny that their combined mass is only a modicum of that of our planet. Astronomers had long been prepared to discover planetary bodies in the enormous space which separates the orbit of Mars from that of the majestic Jupiter. Others more sanguine still, ventured to predict the presence of some huge planet circling beyond the orbit of Uranus, the then furthest known body of our system.

Uranus was the discovery of Herschel, and it was noticed that this large globe was deflected from his theoretical path by some unknown force. Bessel, in 1840, foretold the finding of this mysterious body, and a little later, Adams in England, and Leverrier in France, demonstrated mathematically the position in the heavens in which the new planet would be found. Unfortunately, Adams' calculation was laid aside and forgotten by the official astronomer to whom it was sent. Arago and the French scientists, on the other hand, cordially encouraged Leverrier to proceed with his labours. When the calculation was complete, Leverrier despatched it to Galle at Berlin Observatory, requesting the German astronomer to search in a specified spot in the sky for the perturber of Uranus. In the evening of the September day on which Galle received Leverrier's communication he directed his telescope towards the predicted position and within one degree only of it he saw the anxiously awaited planet we now know as Neptune.

Leverrier also surmized the existence of a planet between Mercury and the Sun. This he termed Vulcan, and he inferred its presence from certain perturbations in Mercury's orbit but so far this hypothetical planet has evaded the search of the astronomer. Several moons have been added to the solar system during the past century. The most interesting of these satellites are the two small moons which race round Mars. They were discovered by Hall and christened Deimos and Phobos:—

One of them is poised only 6,000 miles from Mars, and whirls about him almost four times as fast as he revolves, seeming thus, as viewed by the Martian, to rise in the west and set in the east, and making the month only one-fourth as long as the day.

In 1850 the dark inner crape-ring of Saturn was discovered and much excellent work has since been executed in connection with that wonderful planet. But our own pale attendant has yielded secrets which are far more interesting to terrestrial beings. The inconstant moon was known to exhibit a tendency to outrun the earth, because eclipses occurred rather less than a moment

before their calculated time. This anomaly was traced by Laplace and Lagrange to a slight eccentricity in the earth's orbit, and the stability of our system seemed established.

Adams, however, in the course of a critical study of Laplace's calculation, detected an error, which, when allowed for, left half our moon's acceleration unexplained. A serious difficulty was thus presented, but Helmholtz thought he saw its solution in the tidal phenomena of our planet. Tidal friction acts as a constant brake on the earth's rotation and must, in the vast range of time covering the earth's history, have lessened the rate of rotation, thus increasing the duration of the day.

The theory of Helmholtz was soon seen to involve serious consequences. For it postulated not merely a modification which ultimately righted itself, but a ceaseless change constantly acting in one direction only. In 1879, the late Sir George Darwin demonstrated that the pull of the tides in retarding the motion of the earth must in addition, thrust the moon further and further from us into space. Thus, as the moon is slowly receding from the earth, and has evidently been doing so for many millions of years, that satellite must in past periods have been a much closer neighbour than at present, and at some date immensely distant it must have formed part of the earth itself before our planet, then in a plastic state, had urged its attendant into space. At the period when the parent earth threw off its moon it is estimated that our globe spun on its axis in a day of from two to four hours.

Since the far off time when the earth and moon parted company, the day has slowly increased to its present length of four and twenty hours. Meanwhile, the moon has been pushed away to a distance of 238,000 miles, and she continues on her outward journey on a spiral orbit. At some future date so immensely remote that the imagination fails to grasp it, astronomers hold that the day will equal the month, the moon will cease to influence the tides, and the earth will present one face only to its receded satellite much as that silvery orb now reveals one side only of her surface to us. And some think that just as the moon slowly departed from her parent orb, so at some coming period unspeakably distant, the moon will slowly sail through the heavens on her return journey to rejoin her mother, only to slay her in a final caress. This is a dark prospect, but the human race will probably have been long extinct and forgotten before this catastrophe overwhelms both earth and her daughter moon.

• In a powerful passage, Professor A. D. White states that:—

The belief that every comet is a ball of fire flung from the right hand of an angry God to warn the grovelling dwellers on earth was received into the early Church, transmitted through the Middle Ages to the Reformation period, and in its transmission was made all the more precious by supposed textual proofs from Scripture.¹

Throughout the Dark Ages comets were universally regarded in Christendom as heralds of misery and death, and even as late as 1456, when a comet flamed in the sky, so terrible seemed its menace, that the then Pope, Calixtus III. solemnly commanded the whole Catholic world to set aside several days for prayer to God to ward off the evils of the comet and to turn the wrath of the threatening monster against the Turks. Against the Turks and the comet, the supplications of the faithful proved quite unavailing for the former captured Constantinople which they still retain, while the direful comet, which is familiar to us as Halley's, has continued to periodically appear in the heavens at its appointed hour ever since.

¹ *Warfare of Science with Theology*, vol. i., p. 177.

Steadily menaced by theology science calmly stripped the sinister stars of their power to distress mankind. But long after the laws of motion the erratic comets obey had been established by the astronomer, innumerable uncanny superstitions concerning them remained unshaken among the illiterate and religious masses of Europe.

Isaac Newton demonstrated that the comet of 1680 was controlled in its movements by Kepler's laws, and when in 1758 the same comet returned, as Halley predicted it would, after accomplishing its seventy-six years' journey through space, the more thoughtful became convinced that these alleged supernatural harbingers of woe were as harmless as other natural phenomena with which they were more closely acquainted.

But it was reserved to the nineteenth century to completely explain the nature and movements of cometary bodies. The eminent Olber's advanced the view that the comet's tail, which has always created the greatest alarm with the ignorant, is, in sober truth made up of the most attenuated vapours, and that it is repelled from the comet's head by the electrical influence of the Sun with a velocity of over 100,000 miles a second. This fruitful suggestion lay dormant for some fifty years, when Zollner and Bredichin developed Olber's hypothesis into the splendid theory now generally received.

In the words of an able historian of science, Dr. H. S. Williams:—

It is held that comets and the Sun are similarly electrified, and hence mutually repulsive. Gravitation vastly outmatches this repulsion in the body of the comet, but yields to it in the case of gases, because electrical force varies with the surface, while gravitation varies only with the mass. From study of atomic weights, and estimates of the velocity of thrust of cometary tails, Bredichin concluded that the chief components of the various kinds of tails are hydrogen, hydrocarbons, and the vapour of iron; and spectroscopic analysis goes far towards attaining these assumptions.

Theoretical considerations aside, however, the airy nature of the comet's appendage has been proved beyond all dispute. Twice during the past century our planet passed through a comet's tail. In 1861 the earth even plunged into some 300,000 miles of a comet's body and very few people were aware that anything out of the ordinary had occurred. Some thought they noticed a curious glow in the atmosphere. No other change was detected by the strictest investigation and the former demon of the skies was dethroned for ever.

Nor is this all. There can be no question that the once terrible tail is drawn from the comet's nucleus by the sun's influence, thus weakening the substance of the comet. After a comet has ventured several times within the sun's sphere of influence it consequently becomes more and more exhausted until its transforming material is gone completely. Numerous cometary bodies exist in the solar system that have been deprived of their earlier glory. Jupiter and the other major planets have pulled several comets within reach of the sun's power. But their captive condition was not fully realized until 1822, when Encke proved that the comet which now carries his name was travelling round the sun in so small an orbit that it completed its journey in three and a-half years. Biela's comet was subsequently shown to move round our luminary in about six years. Short period comets are now known to be fairly numerous. These erratic bodies have been captured by the larger planets to be held in bondage by the sun.

These imprisoned comets have been compelled to abandon their earlier mode of travel "checked in their proud hyperbolic sweep, made captive in a planetary net, deprived of their trains, these quondam freelances of the

heavens are now mere shadows of their former selves." In size they remain considerable, but their mass is so small that the gravitational tyranny of their gaolers renders them impotent. The perpetual pull of both sun and planets is slowly reducing them to fragments. Biela's comet was split in twain after encountering the gravitational influence of the earth in 1832, and afterwards its severed parts were separated by millions of miles of space. In 1852 this comet was again due but the most diligent search failed to discover it. The once majestic comet had been shattered to pieces.

The world was alarmed at the near approach of Biela's comet in 1832, and twenty years after it was sought for in vain. Astronomers were anxious to ascertain the fate of its fragments. A study of the shooting stars solved the mystery. The researches of the American Professor Newton and the English Professor Adams revealed the verity that even the meteors are subject to gravitation and circle round the sun in elliptical orbits. Science is ever international, for then the Italian Professor Schiaparelli carried the matter a step further by showing that one of the various swarms of shooting stars travels along the orbit once swept by a comet. This discovery was supplemented by other phenomena of related character, and scientists began to surmise that meteors were the shattered remnants of comets. This speculation developed into a practical certainty in 1872, when the earth traversing the path pursued by the broken Biela encountered a heavy shower of shooting stars instead of the vanished comet. In a sense, the comets represent an earlier stage of stellar evolution, when they were more widely distributed than at present. Even now, the spaces through which our planet journeys are so densely strewn with cometary dust that, according to Professor Newcomb's calculation, a million tons of these particles fall to the earth every day. These fragments on entering our atmosphere fuse through collision, and then we see them darting towards the earth like lovely gems of light.

T. F. PALMER.

Skeleton Sermons.

IV.—The First Vendetta.

To the ordinary observer blood is just a red fluid. "For the blood is the life." Those who have dipped deeply into the mystery of man know that there are living corpuscles in the blood—red (phagocytes) and white (leucocytes).

Ever since man came into existence these micro-organisms have been at war. There has not been a truce for thousands of years. The war of the phagocytes and leucocytes is the most interesting chapter in human life—but it is little read, and it is less understood.

It was a leucocyte that brought about the fall of man. It happened this way. Adam, who had been drinking rather too freely of the waters of the Euphrates, went for a nap under the family apple-tree. A colony of phagocytes had established themselves in the vicinity of Adam's jugular vein, where they found good pickings, and quenched their thirst with rich red blood.

Everything went well until a leucocyte, which had hitherto been contented to roam about the marrow bones, left the corner allotment in Adam's big toe, and explored the country northward. It happened on this particular day that he strolled in among the phagocyte tribe. His white appearance soon attracted attention, but it was not until the two-spotted stranger commenced to make eyes at the chief's wife that trouble commenced. The boss phagocyte, who had only one eye, but a mouth of considerable proportions, resented the

overtures. The leucocyte scented trouble, and leaving the red country, dodged down south by a highway running around Adam's shoulder-blade, with a viaduct to the backbone. A tingling sensation ran through the body of the first man.

The two combatants dodged round the patella, and Adam, kicking out as the war waged, stabbed his foot on a rock, and frantically yelled to Eve to get busy with the family medicine-chest.

"Apples is the only medicine I knows," said Eve, reaching for a rock, and clodding at a rosy one on the lower branch. "Will yer try one?"

"Try anything. I'd bite the twelfth letter in the alphabet, only it might deprive us of a place for our winter holiday." Then he dug his teeth in the apple.

At that moment the phagocyte side-stepped, and the leucocyte tripped over a protruding nerve-end. Before he could wink his eye, snap went the beak of the phagocyte, and all was over with the enemy. The news of the leucocyte's death attracted his brethren from the regions of Adam's big toe, and the phagocytes came down from the jugular vein in a solid phalanx. A battle royal started. It has been going on ever since.

It was too much for Adam. He rose in agony, and started off for the Euphrates to drown his sorrow, with Eve following stealthily in the rear. That is the oldest story of the wars of the red and white. It has made history in every country in the world. England had her war of the red and white roses. Japan still uses red and white ribbons in memory of a similar event.

THE OWL.

Acid Drops.

A correspondent—whom we fancy must have been made the subject of some Christian attacks on Colonel Ingersoll—writes us, very anxiously inquiring what it was that the great American Freethinker said about alcohol. Well, he said several things. Here is one of them:—

I send you some of the most wonderful whisky that ever drove the skeleton from a feast or painted landscapes in the brain of man. It is the mingled souls of wheat and corn. In it you will find the sunshine and the shadow that chased each other over the billowy fields; the breath of June; the carol of the lark; the dews of night; the wealth of summer and autumn's rich content, all golden with imprisoned light. Drink it, and you will hear the voices of men and maidens singing the "Harvest Home," mingled with the laughter of children. Drink it, and you will feel within your blood the starlit dawn, the dreamy, tawny dusk of many perfect days. For forty years this liquid joy has been within the happy staves of oak, longing to touch the lips of men.

We give this passage in full because it has been used by stupid bigots to support the charge that Ingersoll encouraged drunkenness. Dull themselves, they can allow neither for the play of fancy nor the use of imagery. Ingersoll himself said of the attacks made on him in connection with this passage:—

There are some people so constituted that there is no room in the heaven of their minds for the butterflies and moths of fancy to spread their wings. Everything is taken in solemn and stupid earnest. Such men would hold Shakespeare responsible for what Falstaff said about "sack" for Mrs. Quickly's notion of propriety.

For ourselves, we fail to see how any but fools and bigots could base a serious charge upon a passage of the character of this one.

What Ingersoll really thought, in his serious mood, of the abuse of alcohol is seen in the following passage on an occasion when anything but serious speech would have been out of place:—

I believe that from the time it issues from the cooled and poisonous worm of the distillery, until it empties into the hell of crime, dishonour, and death, that it demoralizes every-

body who touches it. I do not believe anybody can contemplate the subject without becoming prejudiced against this liquid crime. All we have to do, gentlemen, is to think of the wrecks upon either bank of the stream of death—of the suicides, of the insanity, of the poverty, of the ignorance, of the distress, of the little children tugging at the faded dresses of weeping and despairing wives asking for bread; of the men of genius it has wrecked; the millions struggling with imaginary serpents produced by this devilish thing. And when you think of the jails, of the almshouses, of the asylums, of the scaffolds upon either bank—I do not wonder that every thoughtful man is prejudiced against the damned stuff called alcohol.

We need hardly say that Ingersoll's detractors never cite *that* passage.

The Young Men's Christian Association has decided to close its doors on batchelors of military age who have not joined the Army. One of the directors says the organization "has no use for conscientious objectors." Apparently the Y.M.C.A. is more concerned with commercialism than conscience.

At a meeting of the L. C. C. Education Committee the other day, the question of a form of prayer for elementary schools was brought up. Canon Swallow recommended the prayer on the ground that teachers were not compelled to use it, and that it was "perfectly innocuous." We should agree that it was perfectly idiotic, but we are not quite so sure as to its being innocuous. The great thing for the parsons is to form the *habit* of prayer. Nothing else matters. We hope the teachers will exercise their privilege of dispensing with this prayer altogether.

Mr. Justice Darling says, "It is often found that men possessing the greatest religious zeal are men possessing low intellectual attainments." Perhaps Justice Darling had the Bishop of London in his mind when this statement was made.

We have still time to attend to other things beside war. At Brierly Hill, Staffordshire, a sweetshop keeper was fined for selling sweets on Sunday. At the same time fifteen customers were proceeded against for purchasing the sweets. This is the first time that a prosecution of this kind has taken place, and they were all fined five shillings each. Perhaps when the War is over the legislature will have enough common sense to repeal these legal relics of 17th century Puritanism.

Griffith Llewellyn Jones, a well-known local preacher, who was charged some time ago with defrauding five women under promise of marriage, was sentenced at the Bath Quarter Sessions to fifteen months' hard labour. It would have served him right if he had been sentenced to live with the whole five.

War quickens the religious instinct, say the clergy. This was not very apparent in a case at the Wiltshire Assizes, when two soldiers were committed for trial on a charge of sacrilege and arson at Codford Church.

The Southend-on-Sea Church League urge that all cinema films should be censored by some unofficial body before being exhibited. We should like to know if the "unofficial body" is to be composed of elderly spinsters and clergymen before we express a further opinion.

Canon Pierce, of Prittlewell, Essex, says that "when the end of this great War is reached, there will be a greater opportunity than ever for the spread of the Christian faith." A cynic might add, that if Christians do not speedily stop killing each other, the faith will be represented by "two or three gathered together."

Christians have been exploiting the memory of Shakespeare. The Young Men's Christian Association has named a "hut" after the great writer, and the collection at the Westminster Abbey Tercentenary service is to be devoted to the upkeep of the hut. "All's well that ends well"—for Christians.

We continue to receive from all parts of the country complaints as to the treatment of Freethinkers by the Tribunals appointed to hear appeals under the Military Service Act. These complaints centre round those who have appealed on the ground of having a conscientious objection against military service. We are not now concerned with whether these appeals voice a genuine conscientious objection, or whether they are mere excuses to evade service. Nor do we wish to contest the right of these Tribunals to convince themselves the objection is a genuine one before granting exemption. It is, indeed, their duty to do so. Our complaint is that in a very large number of instances these Tribunals create a disqualification on religious grounds. And that was something that was never contemplated by the Act, and to which the Act as it stands gives no encouragement whatever.

What, for instance, is to be made of a case where the Chairman of a Tribunal remarks, on a man declaring himself an Agnostic, "You can't be an Agnostic and have a conscience," or when a man is flatly told that if he had claimed exemption on religious grounds, it would have been granted; or when another is informed that, being a Freethinker, his objection is only a political one? And these are not isolated cases; they are occurring all over the country, and their existence constitutes a public scandal. We have for long prided ourselves that in courts of law—save for the operation of sheer prejudice—Freethinker and Christian meet on equal ground. But here are newly set-up courts, dealing with a most serious issue, and which openly make an avowal of Freethought the reason for declaring a man to be outside certain provisions provided by an Act of Parliament. The assumption that only a religious person may have conscientious scruples about *anything* is not only an impertinent one; it is a sentence of moral—and partly legal—outlawry against all who are not followers of some God or other. Such a state of things makes one wonder what sort of freedom it is for which we are fighting.

Frankly, we do not mind saying that the whole treatment of conscientious objection to military service represents, in our opinion, a political blunder. The logical course would have been either voluntarism or compulsion all round, in the sense that certain classes were included in it. This would have left those who have an objection to military service open to make their protest in their own way—which apparently they still have to do. But having deliberately arranged that certain people should be permitted to withdraw from military service, it is only just that this undertaking should be honourably observed by those entrusted with the enforcement of the Act. To say that a man owes a duty to the State, and that the State has the right to call upon him to take up arms to defend the community, is an arguable and an understandable position. But to admit that there are cases where that duty is cancelled, and then to insult, imprison, or ill-treat men who have tried to exercise that right of withdrawal, is neither logical nor just.

That pessimistic ecclesiastic, Dean Inge, says that "nintenths of our work is drudgery." Perhaps he was thinking of his own profession, where so much of the work is theological tomfoolery.

Some of the more sober members of Parliament are not pleased at the introduction of the "ginger" politician. In religious controversy something hotter than ginger is introduced by the clergy.

The Right-Reverend Father in God, the Bishop of Chelmsford, standing in St. Paul's Cathedral, said that victory delays because of our national sins, and he gave a list of eight. Cannot his lordship see the logic of his statement that, if we are weak for our sins, Germany is strong by reason of her Christian virtues? His lordship had better try again.

Mr. Horatio Bottomley's conversion is not so complete as it might be. Writing in the *Sunday Pictorial*, he says, "Human beings are mere marionettes in the hands of the Great Magician." It looks as if Mr. Bottomley preferred the theology of Omar Khayyam to that of the Bible.

How is it that holiness is so frequently associated with hysteria? Mr. Arthur Mee, writing in *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, under the heading of "A Plain Man's Pulpit," says, referring to the Kaiser and the European War: "There is only one end in a fight like that. We will set up Tyburn Gate and let this man dangle there before Britons, Frenchmen, Belgians, and Russians shall be his slaves." For a plain man's utterance, the statement is decidedly coloured.

Lady Frances Balfour, whom the Yellow Press delight in calling a "distinguished stateswoman," says "the discovery of woman is a great war surprise like the discovery of America by Columbus." Shade of Cleopatra! "Stateswomen" seems as obtuse as statesmen. Like the Bourbons, they learn nothing and forget nothing.

Gluttony is frequently associated with godliness. On Good Friday hot cross buns made their appearance, but in most cases they were smaller than usual. Scholars have traced these delicacies back to the time of the Pharaohs, and there is every prospect of them outliving the Christian religion.

The Bishop of Chelmsford has surely broken the record of pulpit absurdities on the subject of the War. Preaching at St. Paul's the other day, he declared that the War lasts so long, not because of the military strength of Germany, but because God, who never forgets, has not yet finished his chastisement of the nations for their respective sins. Victory will eventually fall to the lot of the Allies, no doubt; but they must let Patience have her perfect work. Russia has been driven back because of her abominable persecution of the Jews; Belgium is suffering the due penalty of her unspeakable cruelties on the Congo; and France is undergoing punishment on account of her overthrow of God and religion. The instrument of this terrific vengeance is Atheistic Germany, just as Heathen Persia was of old chosen to chastise rebellious Israel.

Dr. Watts-Ditchfield's severest and most comprehensive indictment, however, was levelled against England. The charges hurled at the head of our own unfortunate country are eight in number, each one of which is sufficient to damn her. Here they are: the forcing of the opium traffic on China; the refusal to interfere when the Armenians were being massacred; the increase of Sunday pleasure-seeking, drinking, and immorality; the unhealthiness of public spirit as shown in the press; the neglect of the housing question, and the begrudging of money for old age pensions and the removal of slums; the failure of the Church to win men, with the result that after sixteen centuries with a Bishop in London only about one in a hundred attends communion; the culpable waste of time in useless controversy over non-essentials, such as vestments; and, chief of all perhaps, the insane demand for short sermons and short services. No other comment on the above deliverance is needed than the one supplied by the *Evening News* for April 17: "An Amazing Sermon at St. Paul's; Stream of Nonsense from a Bishop."

That sunshine soldier, the Bishop of London, does not allow his military duties to interfere with matters ecclesiastic. He is now taking part in a crusade against music-hall promenades, and recently took a deputation to the London County Council. Did he wear his khaki uniform on that fatal occasion?

It looks as though we are gaining converts among what W. S. Gilbert calls "the dignified clergy." The Bishop of Kensington told an audience the other day that Church people were living in a fool's paradise if they did not know that the poorer classes were alienated from them. Taken as a whole, he said, "the clergy stand forth in their eyes as the obsequious minions of capitalists and employers; and the great body of the faithful, worshipping Sunday by Sunday in pew-rented places of worship in the West End and elsewhere, are identified with that system of smug middle classdom which bolsters up, in their eyes, those capitalists and employers." We wonder whether the Bishop of Kensington reads the *Freethinker*!

Special Propaganda Fund.

Two or three weeks ago I mentioned that a proposal had been made me of some importance to the Free-thought cause, one which promised to provide means for a systematic propaganda for several years. The offer came to me quite unsolicited, which is at once my excuse—if any be needed—for now writing about it, and also a testimony to the generous impulses of the intending donor. This offer reached me in the following form:—

I hereby offer to give to the Free-thought Cause, through Chapman Cohen, to be expended as his judgment approves, such sum of money, not in excess of two hundred pounds sterling, as may equal the sum of those donations which shall be actually in the possession of Chapman Cohen, which shall have been given as a result of this offer; said sums to be used in the same way. Mr. Cohen's written statement of the amount due under this offer, dated and signed, to be written on the back of this paper; on receipt of it I will at once remit draft for the amount.

For the moment I must keep the name of the donor private.

I feel very loth to make another appeal for funds to *Freethinker* readers, but I see no other honourable alternative. It would not be consistent with a right sense of duty for any individual to decline such a proposal—particularly in the present state of affairs—because it was personally unpleasant to ask for money. It is my duty to place the matter before those interested, and leave it for them to decide. And I have reason to believe that their decision will be wholly favourable.

It will be observed that the intending donor is pledged to give *something*; how much depends upon others. All he does is to limit his liability to the sum of £200; and from what I know of him, his promise is as good as his cheque. And those who do subscribe will have the satisfaction of knowing that every sovereign given means two. It is a better rate of interest than the War Loan.

A few friends who have been made acquainted with this offer have promptly and generously come forward to meet it. The following ladies and gentlemen have promised or subscribed the undermentioned sums:—

Mr. J. M. Gimson, £25; Mr. and Mrs. Jessop, £20; J. Sumner, £5 5s.; G. F. McCluskey, £5; J. A. Fallows, £4 4s.; Mrs. E. Adams, £3; E. B. £2 2s.; A. H. Smith, £2; Collette Jones, £1 1s.; A. Delve, £1 1s.; X. Y. Z., £1 1s.; H. B. Dodd, £1; B. Bowlem, £1; S. Leech, £1; E. Raggett, £1; G. B. Taylor, £1; A. W. B. Shaw, £1; Mrs. M. McDougall, 10s.; E. Bishop, 5s.; L. Gjemre, £2; K. C. Clarkson, £2; Mrs. M. Glass, £1; J. Neate, £1; H. Irving, 10s.; J. G. Finlay, 10s.; W. H. Hicks, £1 1s.; J. Pendlebury, £2 2s.; Mrs. F. Burns, £1; T. Robertson, £5; J. B. Middleton, £5; E. Syers, £1; J. G. White, £1; Veteran, £5—
Total, £104 12s.

Judging by the above list I do not think there is much doubt that the whole of the £200 offered will be secured for the benefit of our movement. If more than this sum is subscribed, so much the better. £400 will make possible a well-planned propaganda for several years, and if this is as successful as it should be, will, in turn, provide the means for activity over a still longer period. New ground may be broken, and old centres of propaganda revived. From my experience during the past winter—conducted under every possible disadvantage—I feel certain that the results of a vigorous and sustained propaganda will be most satisfactory. There is every reason for a movement such as ours to be in a strong position of attack or defence at whatever time the present War comes to an end.

It will be observed that the donor of the £200 stipulates that the money shall be expended as my judgment approves. To that I purpose giving a liberal interpretation. Whenever possible, expenditure of public money, subscribed for a public purpose, should be administered by more than one person. I propose, therefore, a committee of three or four persons for this work. Mr. J. T. Lloyd has consented to act, and one or two other well-known Freethinkers will be invited to co-operate on this committee. It will remove all possibility of misapprehension, and provide a security for the proper disposition of the Fund. And as it may be found possible, information regarding the Fund will be made public through the *Freethinker*.

I have only to add that this Fund will remain open only for a short period—it should not be later than May 21. The gentleman who made the offer of the £200 informed me that it was offered in this way because he desired his action to inspire others to give. I feel sure his anticipations will be realized. The sums already given or promised foreshadow this. It is a great chance of giving the Free-thought cause a helping hand at a critical moment; and while all may not be able to give large sums, there are thousands who can afford to give something. At any rate, the opportunity is there, and I have done my duty in bringing the matter forward.

Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to me, and will be acknowledged in the *Freethinker* as they are received.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Mr. C. Cohen's Engagements.

Sunday, April 30.—South Place Institute, South Place, E.C.; at 6.30 p.m., "Freethought, Religion, and the War."

To Correspondents.

D. V. THOMAS.—We do not know of any verbatim report of the Foote-Warschauer debate, although a pretty full report appeared in the *Freethinker* at the time. What were the questions that Mr. Foote in "set terms" declined to answer upon the "avowed ground" of his inability to do so? We were present on both nights, and cannot recall any questions of the kind. There were several, we think, that were dismissed as irrelevant or improper, but that is a different thing. And we should not care to trust Dr. Warschauer's mere statement on the matter.

H. J. HASTINGS.—We have returned your friend's letter by post. Thanks for a sight of it, and glad to learn that he has become a "convert" to the gospel of common sense, and is managing to convert others at the Front. We shall be pleased to hear from him when he has the time to write.

H. EVETTS.—Thanks for copy of the report. It will prove useful to us later.

A. R. W.—Received with thanks, and shall appear at as early a date as is possible.

C. A. W.—Yours is a very generous offer, but, as you will see, we cannot avail ourself of it at present. The opportunity may present itself later.

G. F. DIXON.—As you will have seen, your draft reached us quite safely, and was duly acknowledged in Memorial Fund List. We have, therefore, destroyed the duplicate draft, which also came safely to hand.

I. BREEZE.—No space this week, owing partly to holiday rush. Will write next week. Please keep us informed.

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.

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

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

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.

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.

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Cohen lectures this evening (April 30) at South Place Institute, on "Freethought Religion and the War." The time for the lecture has been fixed a little earlier than is usual—6.30—so that the meeting will be over by 8 o'clock. South Place is very centrally situated; it is within five minutes from the Liverpool Street terminus for both 'bus and train, and within three minutes of the tramway terminus. It is well that while so many others are talking about the War in London the voice of a Freethinker should be heard, and we hope that London saints will not only be present themselves, but will induce their religious friends to attend likewise. The chair will be taken by Mr. A. B. Moss. Admission is free to all seats.

Mr. Lloyd visits Liverpool to-day (April 30), and will lecture in the Marlborough Hall, Hardman Street, in the afternoon and evening. His subjects, "Heroes of our Faith," and "George Meredith and the Joy of Life," are very attractive, and those who know Mr. Lloyd will need no encouragement to be present. Those who do not, should avail themselves of the opportunity. We hope to hear of crowded meetings.

We refer elsewhere to the treatment of Freethinkers who have claimed exemption before Tribunals appointed under the Military Service Act. As we are inviting the attention of the authorities to this matter and should be obliged if all Freethinkers who have appealed before these Tribunals will supply us *at once* with brief details of their experience. The statements should be brief, but exact. In order to have as complete a collection as possible will all those who have already written kindly repeat their statements. We are not, of course, desirous that Freethinkers should be treated differently to other people, all we desire is that differential treatment shall not be meted out to them *because* of their lack of religious belief. We may not succeed in securing fair play for Freethinkers, but we will at least try.

We have pleasure in acknowledging the sum of £5 from Captain John Latham sent to help "pay for the new type and paper at War rates." We rejoice to learn that Captain Latham's attachment to Freethought is as strong as ever even amid the destructions of the "Great War."

Miss Vance has handed us the following, received from an officer "somewhere in France":—

I was, about a fortnight ago, doubled up with pains in my left side and stomach and my general state was eventually summed up as suffering from "influenza." In hospital I gave my "religion" as "Atheist." The Lieut-Col., R.A.M.C., seemed to take a remarkable liking to me and came and sat evening after evening in my room when I was convalescent. One evening I was talking about Beyers De Wet and the other perjured South African rebels as religious fanatics and the secret came out that he had no time for religious people and always suspected them of crookedness. Nor did he believe in any kind of religion.

The last time I wrote myself an Atheist was in the Boer War when I was attached to the Loyal North Lancs., and then, after a lot of argument and correspondence on the impossibility of doing without a religion in the army, the Colonel—now a General—admitted that if he were strictly honest he would have to write himself down much the same.

So, after all, there's no point in being so timid as some Freethinkers are.

Quite inadvertently our lecture notice last week announced a meeting of the West Ham Branch at Maryland Point for April 23. As was correctly stated in the paragraph in this column it is to-day (April 30) that the Branch opens its outdoor propaganda. We regret the error, and hope that the opening meeting will be in every way satisfactory.

It was one of life's little ironies that the announcements appeared in a religious paper that the Rev. C. Beer would preach on "Temperance," and that the Rev. A. Drinkwater would lecture on "The Joys of the Christian Life."

"The Bishop of London is probably the best publisher's advertising agent in London," says a Carmelite House publication. His lordship puffed Guy Thorne's novel in Westminster Abbey, and later blessed a book by Harold Begbie, and he has praised other great writers whose names we cannot recall. He cannot, however, make the intellectual world read his own sermons.

Thirty-nine more boys than girls were born at Ramsgate last year. Who can now say that Providence does not take a fatherly interest in the War?

Talks With Young Listeners.

VII.—Wells and Flocks.

A CARAVAN of ten camels halted, and the slaves who led them watched while Abraham's oldest servant made the camels kneel beside a well.

"O Yahweh," said the old man, lifting his eyes to heaven, "the evening hour has come, and maidens will come from yon village to fetch water, and I will ask one of them to give me drink. Help me choose just that maid who will make a good wife for my master's son, Laughter."

Handsome was the nut-brown maid Rebecca, and she was courteous withal, and cheerfully drew water, and rested the pitcher on her brown palm while the old slave took a deep draught; and then she tripped down the steps to the well, and again and again fetched water, pouring it into a long trough for the camels.

Her dark eyes gleamed when the old man gave her a golden ring and golden bracelets. A few eager questions from him revealed that she was a kinswoman of his master, Abraham. He bent his head to the sand, loudly thanking Yahweh that his errand had so well thriven, while Rebecca flew home to tell the news. Ere long, the camels were stalled, and the old slave sat in the centre of an excited family circle, who listened to his story of the journey from Canaan, and gazed with delight upon the gold and silver jewels which he fetched from his baggage as presents for Rebecca and her kinsfolk.

So the nut-brown maid was sent off on camel-back amid blessings and farewells, and in due time she was married to Isaac, owner of herds and digger of wells. A quiet and harmless man was Isaac, though his two sons caused him sore trouble.

These two sons were Esau the elder, a wiry, noisy, red-haired fellow, fond of hunting; and Jacob the shepherd, a smooth-faced, smooth-tongued, and scheming youth, who had a knack of bargaining and profit-making. Rebecca treated Jacob as her favourite son, and sharp was the sting she suffered for her folly.

Isaac was now aged and nearly blind, and wished to give the magic spell of his blessing to his beloved son Esau; and very joyful was Esau when the father bade him kill a deer, and place roast venison at his bedside so that he might eat and enjoy himself, and speak the blessing in good humour.

Rebecca, the quick-witted, devised a plot. She advised Jacob to tie pads of kid-skin upon his face and neck and hands, and take a dish of kid's-flesh, which she had cooked and spiced, to old Isaac, and pretend to be Esau. When Isaac placed his fingers on his son's face and hands, he was puzzled, and said:—

"The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the rough hands of Esau. Are you truly my son Esau?"

"Yes, father," replied the deceiver.

"The rich dew be on your land," said Isaac, "and much corn and wine shall be yours, and your brother shall bow down to you as his lord."

Jacob had scarcely escaped to his smiling mother, when the red-haired huntsman entered, bearing a platter of smoking venison, and exclaiming gruffly but heartily:—

"Sit up, father; eat, and bless me."

Very unhappy was the scene that ensued, the aged Isaac breaking down in distress, and Esau bursting into a passion of tears, and praying:—

"Bless me, even me also, O my father!"

Old Laughter, with tears in his dim eyes, gave a blessing, though he could not alter what he had said already to Jacob; and Esau strode away, muttering oaths to murder the trickster.

The trickster, always nimble to save his skin, fled away, and Rebecca saw her spoiled darling no more, and that was her sharp sting.

At night, Jacob lay down in a stony place, his head resting on a boulder, and while stars sparkled in the dark sky of Canaan, he slept and dreamed.

He saw a stairway, or ladder, mounting from earth to heaven, and shining people passed up and down; and Yahweh stood at the top, saying to the Wandering Jew who lay on the stones:—

"I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham and Isaac; and your children shall be many, and I will bring you back safe to this land."

Jacob awoke, and raised a stone as a pillar, and poured oil over it in libation, and called the spot "Bethel," that is, the House of God; and then, in his bargaining way, he said:—

"If Yahweh does truly bring me back, and give me bread to eat, and clothes to wear, why, here and now, I vow that Yahweh shall be my God; and this pillar stands here for witness."

He wandered on till he came to a green pasture, where the flock of sheep waited to drink water from a well; but a slab of stone lay on the well's mouth. The shepherds in charge told the travel-stained Jacob that the watering would begin as soon as their master's daughter, Rachel, arrived with yet another flock. Now Rachel, the dark-haired and dark-eyed maid, was Jacob's cousin.

Lifting the slab, Jacob busied himself in drawing water and tending the bleating flock. To do him justice, he was a clever and active shepherd; a better shepherd than a son or brother; and it was not long before he was serving Laban, his uncle, as master-herdsman of the sheep and goats. After the custom of the country, he had two wives and two slave-wives; and the two wives were brown-eyed Rachel and blue-eyed Leah, her sister. His sons were twelve.

Jacob's wages for work were paid in kind; that is, in sheep and goats, all the animals that had brown spots and splashes on their hair or wool being his share; and you may be sure the trickster was a most successful breeder, and his flocks were larger than his uncle's. He now resolved to put Yahweh's promise to the test, and return to Canaan. To steal away was no new thing to him.

So one day when Laban was at a distant brook, shearing and washing his sheep, Jacob collected wives, children, slaves, goats, sheep, and camels, and led the caravan westwards as fast as the long procession could be got to move. The land of Canaan was almost in sight before Laban and his band of slaves overtook the run-aways.

High words were shouted on both sides, Jacob complaining that his reward for shepherding was so mean during the last twenty years, and Laban complaining that his gods had been stolen. And so in truth they were; but Rachel slyly sat on the precious little images, and smiled blandly at her father, and his search was in vain. After the storm came the rainbow, and Jacob and Laban piled up a heap of stones, and sat on the newly made mound, and ate together in solemn token of friendship; and Jacob reared up another pillar, and called it Mizpah, or the Watch-tower; for it would watch to see that the bond of friendship was duly observed. And so they parted, one to go east, the other west.

Jacob had now reached a mountain pass which led through the land of Edom, where the hill-men were ruled by a fierce chieftain, who was none other than our old friend Esau. He heard that chieftain Esau was marching down with four hundred spearmen and archers; and this was the man (so his conscience whispered) whom he had so cruelly cheated.

He used his wits to good effect. Sending his flocks and herds on first, he bade the slaves offer all these animals as a free gift to Esau; and, if Esau acted in a threatening way, the women and children would all the more easily escape since they were in the rear. Dusk had come on, and the stars peeped out, and Jacob was left alone with his brooding thoughts and fears.

Suddenly, in the twilight, he saw a figure rise up before him, striding across the path. It was a challenge from the God, or Elohim, of Edom.

Jacob flung himself upon the Elohim, and a strenuous and desperate wrestling took place, and lasted hour after hour. As the dawn broke, the Elohim gave sign that the fight was closed; and before he fled from the light of the morning, the Elohim gave Jacob a new name, *Israel*. The battle had left Jacob lame in one leg, but he limped up the mountain road in joyous mood, for he felt that his Yahweh was stronger than the God of Edom.¹

Esau came at a warlike swinging pace down the path, the clatter of armed men making the valley echo; and he was as rough, and red, and gruff,—and good-humoured, as ever. Walking rapidly past the flocks, he confronted Jacob with so hearty a smile, that the trickster brother feared no more, and Esau gave Jacob a smacking, manly kiss, and the brothers wept together.

Then Jacob's wives and bairns came forward and bowed lowly before the mountain chief, who behaved in all kindness and courtesy. Esau returned to his fortress in the hill, and Jacob marched on with his lengthy train, and so into Canaan.

Yes, he had had his bread, and he had had his clothes, and much more; and he duly bore in mind his bargain with Yahweh, and he visited Bethel, or the House of God, and poured oil on the pillar.

And another pillar he raised in sorrow, for death had taken from him his beloved Rachel. She had left him two boys; one was Joseph and the other was the baby Benjamin, who was no sooner born than the mother died. For many years afterwards, the peasants of the countryside pointed cut to the traveller the wayside stone which told of Jacob's tears and Rachel's tomb.

F. J. GOULD.

¹ This explanation of an obscure passage is proposed in the *Encyclopedia Biblica*.

Who Made the Gods?

A Lecture delivered in Chicago by M. M. Mangasarian.

EASTER is a spring festival. It celebrates the rebirth of nature. About this time of the year the brown earth and the bare trees once more pulsate with life. The earth dies, so to speak, in the fall of the year, and remains buried during the months of snow and ice. Then the entombed earth quakes with returning energies. The stone is rolled aside from the grave and life walks forth, young and fair, once again to claim its empire. No god would ever have risen from the dead had there been no spring in nature. It was the bud breaking the clod and pushing aside the stone which suggested resurrection to the theologians. The mysteries of religion are the phenomena of nature exaggerated.

When a man appropriates an article of value belonging to another, he alters it, if he can, to prevent detection. In the same way the religions of the world have changed what they have borrowed to prevent identification. Christmas, Easter, the Mass, the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, as well as the Cross, the Rosary, etc., in the newer religions were copied from the older ones, but remodelled so as to make them appear original. The older religions themselves got their mysteries from nature, but put frills and ruffles on them, as it were, to ward off any suspicion of their origin. One of the reasons for which investigation of the mysteries is not permitted is, that such investigation might disclose the source they were taken from. Just as the man who is wearing a watch, not his own, does not encourage inquiries about it, the clergy do not wish to be questioned about the mysteries they advertise as their own. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, for instance, was not revealed by a voice from heaven, it was nature that suggested the idea. Sex is one of nature's most wonderful achievements. Like everything else, sex is an evolution. It required great stretches of time in which to perfect it. But there was life before there was sex. The lower we descend in the scale of existence the more imperfect is sex. In the lowest levels of life there is practically no sex at all. There is also what we might call the bi-sexual world—wherein the demarcation is not sufficiently developed to make a separation of the sexes possible. Among the lower creeping things procreation is through cleavage—the organism swells and then splits into two. At this stage of life each organism is its own father as well as mother. Ah! that is where the theologian got the idea of the Virgin Birth. If there are creatures in nature that father themselves why could not Krishna of the Hindoos, or Christ of the Christians, be his own sire? The clergy not only got this mystery from nature, but from the lowest stages of vegetable and animal life.

The same is true of the mystery of the Incarnation. It was from nature that the theologian got the idea. The coal in the mines is an incarnation of the sun, as is also the fruit on the trees. The corn has even the gold of the sun upon its cheeks, and so has the black coal when it begins to burn. The sun is in everything. The world is the sun incarnate, and the sun was God at one time. It was this truth of nature which suggested to the creed makers the myth of an incarnate God.

The Eucharist is another mystery patterned after a simple and natural phenomenon. The sun ripens and becomes incarnate in the corn or the wheat which we bake into bread. When we eat the bread we are practically eating the sun. There you have the eating of the body of God in church. The divines borrowed their mysteries from nature but garbled them in the borrowing in order to justify the pretence that they received them by a revelation from above.

Again, it was nature which suggested to the religions, ancient and modern, the mystery of Baptism. "There is no salvation without baptism," said the preachers formerly, and some do still. They got that idea from nature. The soil must be baptised before it can produce. There are no crops, that is to say, no bread, that is to say, no life or salvation, without water. It is water which revives the parched earth and saves the crops. The wilted vegetables lift their heads and become young again when the sun sends them a shower from on high. Is not that the origin of the phrase "baptism from on high"? The showers descending from the clouds and refreshing and regenerating the soil suggested also the phrase, "regeneration through baptism."

But let me explain something else: Why were the simple phenomena of everyday life transformed into divine mysteries? That is a very interesting study, I assure you. Why does the theologian convert the words of the song, "The Spring, the Spring is here!" into "Christ is Risen, Christ is Risen"? Why does he change an intelligible and actual event into a mythical and impossible miracle? I will answer that question by asking another: Why does the King wear a robe of gold, epaulets, medals on his breast, bright buttons on his uniform, badges, and a crown on his head? Because they help to make him look more important to the populace. To the same end are the gorgeous robes of the priest. The majority mind is dazzled by show. It prefers the elaborate and the ornamental to the simple. The populace prefers ceremony to simplicity, the puzzle to science, the labyrinth to the open road, the unintelligible to common sense. Two thousand years ago, if a man had a sickness, it was not because he had taken cold, or had overtaxed his strength, or in some other way neglected the laws of hygiene—oh, no! that explanation was too simple, and the ordinary mind craves for mystery. Hence the disease was caused by disembodied spirits—the sick were "obsessed" or "possessed" people. That made sickness supernatural, and therefore mysterious, which greatly tickled the popular fancy and awed the man who had the malady. Even to-day "divine" scientists rebel at the suggestion that sickness comes from wet feet, or a draught, or impure water. That is too simple an explanation, and the lower class mentality desires—buttons, decorations, shoulder-straps, and frills and ruffles. Hence, it is the "mortal mind," or "error," or "malicious animal magnetism" which causes sickness. To satisfy this craving, myths and fables have been invented. To supply the demand for the marvellous, plain and simple truths have become elaborate and unintelligible dogmas in the creeds.

The populace would believe in a miracle more willingly than they would in a law of nature. If we tell a sick man in Morocco to go home and drink a cup of hot water, or to remain in bed for a few days, or to take some simple remedy—the probabilities are that he will pay no attention to the advice. But tell him to write a verse from the Koran upon a piece of paper, boil the paper, and expose the mixture to the crescent, and then drink it, and he will do it. The mysteriousness of the remedy appeals to him. He is apt to believe in the unintelligible prescription so firmly as even to derive some psychological benefit from it. The ordinary mind craves for mystery, and the religion which satisfies this craving the best is the most popular.

But why do people prefer the obscure to the simple? The answer to that question makes me not only proud, but also hopeful of human nature. Just as hypocrisy is the compliment which vice pays to virtue, superstition is the compliment which ignorance pays to science. The hypocrite wishes to be taken for an honest man;

the ignoramus wishes to be taken for a learned man. The people's preference for mysteries is a desire on their part to appear learned. They have intentionally, as it were, made a number of knots on the string in their hands that they may be seen working on them with puckered brows. They want to be taken for philosophers. That is why their vocabulary is big with long words, and words even which convey no meaning. This is a hopeful sign in the sense that even as the hypocrite who imitates virtue shows his preference for virtue, the populace, with its make-believe mysteries, shows its appreciation for learning. The teacher must avail himself of the desire of the people to *appear* wise, by helping them to become wise in reality.

If I have succeeded in proving that man makes his mysteries—that they did not drop out of the sky, but were invented out of such material as nature provided, I have prepared the way for proving also that man makes his gods in the same way that he makes his mysteries. The common version is that the gods made us; but where is the evidence? Who ever saw a god creating? The Bible says that Elobim—the gods made man; but who made the Bible? The Bible is rumor, and rumor is not evidence. It is well to study these questions because that is the only way we come to know the truth about ourselves, and to know one's self is the first duty of man. But are there any proofs that man made the gods? The evidence that the gods were made by man is overwhelming enough to satisfy even the most exacting and fastidious critic. There are, to begin with, *many* gods. Is not that in itself sufficient to prove that man is a maker of gods? If he did not make *all* the gods, he certainly made most of them. But even if he made only one of the many gods, it is enough to prove that man is a god-maker. The number of gods in India alone runs into the millions. Add to this the Pagan gods that crowded the Olympian heights, the Persian, the Chinese, the Egyptian gods, and the gods of the Scandinavian Valhalla, and the conclusion is inevitable that one of the most prolific crops ever raised by man was the crop of gods. We have made gods of every color, of both sexes, of all sizes, and of contrary dispositions. Can anybody afford to question that statement?

The objection that man only made the false gods, but not the true God, amounts to the claim that our God is the only one that was not made by man, all the others being man-made. But other people claim the same exception for their gods. Each religion or race thinks its own god the only one that was not made by man. If we accept the claims of each for its own god, there would be too many true gods; if, on the other hand, we accept what each religion says of the gods of the others, then there are no gods which were not made by man.

The counterfeit coin, it is said again, proves the genuine coin. In the same way the false gods are supposed to be an argument for the existence of the true god. But how are we going to tell the true god from the false god? You know some of the names of the leading gods—Zeus, Jupiter, Ormuzd, Thor, Yahveh, Allah, Christ. Which of these is God? Is the true god one or three? Is it the god who has a son, or the one who is childless? Is it the god who has a spouse, or the one who is single? How are we going to tell the counterfeit from the genuine divinity, except by saying that ours is the genuine god and yours is the counterfeit? If I have a piece of money I am suspicious of I can easily find out its worth by taking it to the Government. The Government makes the coins and is in a position to tell the counterfeit from the authentic. Where is the religious court that can decide which is the true god? If such a court exists then it is

greater than God, for it makes the god. Select your own court, let the Pope be the court, let the Archbishop of Canterbury be the court, let the three American Cardinals be the court—if it depends upon the court to decide the true god then it is the court that makes the god. If such a court does not exist then there will be no way of telling the man-made god from the self-made god.

It is not safe to encourage people to build on foundations which will not stand the severest tests. The trouble of making morality or our peace of mind and happiness hang on myths is that when we lose the myths we lose everything. Let us give and ask for the truth. Do we know of anything safer?

But a second argument that we are the creators of the gods, is, that the gods, like everything else we make, are perishable. There are more gods who have passed away than there are who still have worshipers. Everything that man makes partakes of his mortality. What man makes time destroys. What a stomach has time! It devours men, gods, worlds. Sometimes the temples built by man outlast the gods worshiped in them. Both temple and god were man-made, but the artist made the edifice more enduring. He had better material for the parthenon or the pyramids or the sphinx, than he had for the making of Zeus, or Osiris, or Thor. The fact that the gods age and die, or lose their popularity and are outclassed by later and more up-to-date divinities is proof that they are the handiwork of man.

A third argument is, that man claims a property right in his gods. This is very interesting. If you try to grab a man's purse, he screams; if you rob him of his land or house, he prosecutes you; if you take away his god, he fights you. The god is his property, just as his farm or his home. One of the patriarchs in the Bible stole the gods of his father-in-law. Well, there was a great row about it. Nobody can steal the universe from us because we have no property right in the universe—we did not make the universe. But people can steal our gods because they are our property—we, ourselves, made them. The sad story of religious persecution proves that man fights for his gods as he does for his property or his country. He fights for this or that creed—the Westminster, or the Augsburg, or the Athanasian, because he made them, they are his properties. What bloody battles have been fought over lands, creeds, and gods! Just as many nations have gone to war over Constantinople, or Jerusalem, or Rome; they have waged wars interminable over Unity and Trinity. The dogma is property in the same sense that a country is. Men fight for their fatherland because it is *their* fatherland; they made it. In the same way they fight for their gods because they made them. If we really believed that a Supreme Being, self-created and eternal, existed, we would have no more fear of losing him, or of being robbed of him by our neighbors, than we would of waking up some morning to find that our next-door neighbors had walked away with the sun. We claim no property right in the sun. We did not make the sun. The sun made us.

(To be continued.)

The Bishop of Chelmsford says he reads and believes the Old Testament. His lordship's credulity seems as wide as the mouth of the "whale" that swallowed Jonah.

The month of May will be as merry as usual, for no less than 351 religious meetings have been arranged in London. Times have not changed much since Lord Macaulay wrote that "Exeter Hall sends forth its annual bray."

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