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*A proposition, the terms of which are unintelligible, is an absolute mystery; to say that we are bound to believe mysteries in this sense is itself nonsense; to say that we do believe them is a lie.* — BOLINGBROKE.

## Views and Opinions.

### The Historic Jesus.

The question of whether the Jesus of the Four Gospels is entitled to rank as an historic character has perplexed several generations of students. Christianity is naturally committed to an affirmative answer; while against this there is the steadily growing belief—based upon unimpeachable evidence—that the Gospel character is no more than, so to speak, precipitated myth. The literature on the subject is so great, the various positions so confusing, and the whole question so overlaid with misapplied scholarship, that ordinary readers must have often longed for some clear statement of the present position of scholarship on the question. In his *The Historical Jesus: a Survey of Positions* (Watts & Co., 3s. 6d.) Mr. John M. Robertson essays this task, and there is no need here to dwell upon either his fitness for the work or to recommend his book to the notice of our readers. There is no one in England better able to state the Freethought position, and few with a greater knowledge of the literature of the subject. The only criticism one is tempted to pass is that the book would have been more effective had it been more expository and less polemical. As it stands, it rather assumes for proper appreciation a more detailed knowledge than the average reader possesses. And at least one of the writers belaboured seems hardly worth the trouble.

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### The Real Issue.

Now, the question of how the Christian religion came into existence, or of the dates of the compilation of the books of the New Testament, the notice taken of the new religion by contemporary writers, the tracing of the various factors that have gone to the making of the obviously composite figure of the New Testament Jesus, all these are interesting enough matters for study, but their settlement is not vital to a rejection of the Gospel Jesus. That rejection rests on quite different grounds. For even though it were possible to prove that the New Testament story is written around a real personage, that the New Testament contains a record of his life by his actual followers, and that contemporary Pagan and Jewish writers refer to both Jesus and his disciples, even then Christianity could not withstand modern criticism. For the vital question is, not whether someone called Jesus existed, nor is it whether a number of people who were his contemporaries believed him to be divinely born, to have worked miracles, and to have been raised from the dead, but, Are these stories true? Are they credible? And the kind of evidence offered in their favour is not so much inadequate as it is hopelessly and utterly irrelevant.

### A Question of Psychology.

Christian writers try to hide this irrelevancy by much idle talk of our having as good evidence for the existence of Jesus as we have for that of Julius Cæsar. Even if there were it would not meet the issue. There is no greater inherent improbability of someone called Jesus existing than of anyone else. Neither is there anything more improbable in some people believing that he worked miracles than in other people believing that someone else worked miracles. All that Christians can prove, all that they have ever attempted to prove, is that a number of people, at a certain date, believed in a divinely born, miracle-working, resurrected Saviour. And no Freethinker need bother to dispute this. He may, indeed, accept this as of the essence of the problem demanding explanation. But no amount of contemporary belief can establish the truth of the things believed in. If that truth is to be established, it must be done in a way different from this. As Mr. Robertson points out, the sciences of anthropology and comparative mythology have transformed the situation. The scientific inquirer is not really concerned with the New Testament story as a narrative of fact. He is concerned with the frame of mind, with the analysis of the intellectual conditions which lead to such a story being accepted as actually true. It is a question of historical psychology.

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### Witchcraft.

Let us take as an illustration the case of witchcraft. If we are to be guided solely by evidence, nothing is better established than this. From every country in the world, and for many centuries, a perfect mountain of evidence could be compiled. This evidence is drawn not alone from uneducated people, but from men of education, of eminence, and of ability. It is of the most precise and most detailed description. The genuineness of it is called into question by none. And yet—so far as educated people are concerned—the reality of witchcraft is accepted by none. Why is this? Is it not because it is seen that the evidence—once accepted as conclusive—is now recognized as hopelessly irrelevant? All that the universal testimony to witchcraft establishes is universal belief in witchcraft. And this no one disputes. As late as the seventeenth century the question was whether certain people had been guilty of witchcraft. In the twentieth century the only question is, What were the conditions that led people to believe in so fantastic and impossible an offence? To repeat what has already been said, the issue has been changed to one of historical psychology.

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### The Culture of the Supernatural.

Now, very clearly, the question of the historicity of Jesus, and of the authenticity of the Gospels, and of contemporary evidence, is of a substantially similar nature. It would be interesting to learn that the New Testament stories gathered round an actual individual, and it would be interesting to know that a number of people then living believed in the stories told about him.

But these things would no more prove the truth of the stories than our knowledge of one Rose Callender in the seventeenth century proves her guilty of witchcraft—for which the Lord Chief Justice ordered her to be hanged. The question is neither the existence nor the honesty of the witnesses, but the nature of the story on behalf of which testimony is adduced. In the case of witchcraft we see that, given a certain stage of culture, the belief in good and evil spirits is a necessary product. In the case of religious belief generally we observe that, as a similar consequence, the belief in incarnations of the Deity, in miracle working, in the possibility of resurrection from the dead, also flourish. We have not to discuss whether these events occurred—such a proposition is almost an insult to civilized intelligence—the only sensible question for discussion is the conditions that bring such beliefs into existence, and the conditions that perpetuate them.

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You cannot, in short, prove the reality of a miraculous event by proving that people believed in it. So far as mere belief goes, the evidence of a street-corner Salvationist is quite as good as that of Paul, or any of the four evangelists. Their evidence can only prove that they believed it, and no one is concerned to deny that. *Past events must be judged in the light of present knowledge.* That is the only sound rule of guidance. We do not question the belief in demoniacal possession, but knowing the facts upon which that belief was based, we reject it, and no amount of contemporary evidence will serve to re-establish that belief in an educated mind. The "evidence" is not inconclusive, it is altogether irrelevant. And so with religious stories as a whole. We know to-day the conditions under which such stories emerge and are accepted as true. We know all the facts upon which such stories are founded, and we are able to explain them without recourse to the supernatural. Our chief task is not to disprove the truth of these stories of incarnate deities and the like, it is rather that of explaining the causes that led men to believe in such fantastic legends. We are not looking round for evidence to disprove Christianity; to the educated mind Christian legends carry their own reputation. We are not wondering whether Christianity may not be true. We *know* it is false. The problem is, how to make the general public realize the nature and the strength of the evidence upon which our conviction rests.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## The Evidence for the Supernatural.

CHRISTIANITY and Spiritualism are in full agreement so far as belief in the supernatural is concerned. It must be borne in mind, however, that there are Spiritualists who entirely repudiate supernaturalism, being firmly convinced that all the phenomena of Spiritualism are perfectly natural. That was the position taken up by the late Dr. Russel Wallace, who maintained that "the very word 'supernatural,' as applied to a fact, is an absurdity," the term he preferred and employed being "preternatural." But the new Spiritualism which, as the *Church Times* for June 9 informs us, "professes to be a religion, and is now preached everywhere by ardent and enthusiastic disciples," is a distinct form of supernaturalism, and, from the philosophical point of view, quite as legitimate a form as Christianity itself. The so-called miracles of Spiritualism are in themselves no more incredible than many of those which the Church claims to have been performed, from time to time, in the name of Christ. We read that Daniel D. Home, the world-renowned medium, experienced, during his mediumistic career, no fewer than a hundred levitations.

On one occasion he is reported to have floated out through the window of one room, some eighty-six feet high, and in at that of another room, a feat witnessed by three persons, two of whom, Lord Adair and Lord Lindsay, gave a minute description of it. But some such miracles are ascribed to Jesus, especially after the Resurrection, when he frequently appeared and disappeared, floating into rooms through shut doors. Jesus not only floated through the air, but did so quite invisibly. The record is that "Jesus cometh, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst." Poor Home could not act on so grand a scale as that. Lord Adair says: "We heard Home go into the next room, heard the window thrown open, and presently Home appeared, standing upright, outside our window, which he opened, and walked in quite coolly." In both cases, natural law was set at defiance, and something done which to normal human beings is utterly impossible. Church history abounds in such incredible tales. Francis d'Assisi was often seen by many persons to rise into the air, though he was not able to ascend to any great height, for his secretary tells us that he could just reach his feet. St. Theresa, a Spanish nun, was frequently raised into the air in the sight of all the sisterhood. At Ragley, in Ireland, a gentleman's butler, in the presence of several people and in broad daylight, shot suddenly upwards and floated about the room above their heads. Now, the point is that such tales of levitation are not one whit more credible when related of illustrious saints than when attributed to spiritualistic mediums. If Ignatius de Loyola and Savonarola could and did swim about at will in the air, violating the great law of gravitation, what was there to hinder Daniel Home from doing the same?

The late Mr. Myers defined Spiritualism as "a religion, philosophy, or mode of thinking based on the belief that the spirits of the dead communicate with living men." His claim was that "veritable manifestations do reach us from beyond the grave." These "veritable manifestations" come, however, and can come, only through special mediums, and through these only in certain eccentric and ridiculous ways. Meantime, let us ignore the alleged *method* of communication, and concentrate our attention upon the *idea* of communication. If the dead still live in a spiritual world, there is certainly nothing unreasonable in the supposition that they can and do communicate with their survivors here; and it is difficult to realize that any harm could accrue from such a transaction. The *Church Times* condemns Spiritualism on two grounds, namely, the first, that "it carries the grossest materialism into the spiritual world," and the second, that the practice of it, in all probability, "brings man into immediate communication with devils." Both grounds are totally invalid. Dr. Wallace held the view that "Spiritualism, if true, furnishes such proofs of the existence of ethereal beings, and of their power to act upon matter, as must revolutionize philosophy"; "demonstrates the actuality of forms of matter and modes of being before inconceivable"; "demonstrates mind without brain, and intelligence disconnected from what we know as the material body"; and "thus cuts away all presumption against our continued existence after the physical body is disorganized and dissolved." Dr. Wallace then makes the following most important claim:—

Spiritualism, if true, demonstrates, as completely as the fact can be demonstrated, that the so-called dead are still alive; that our friends are still with us, though unseen, and guide and strengthen us when, owing to the absence of proper conditions, they cannot make their presence known; and that it thus furnishes that proof of a future life which so many crave, and for want of which so many live and die in anxious doubt, so many in positive disbelief.

Well, Christianity, if true, furnishes positive proofs of the truth of precisely the same dogmas, and affords conclusive demonstrations of exactly the same assumptions. If true, it demonstrates the objective reality of spiritual beings existing apart from and independently of matter, and the duality of man's nature which makes it possible for him to enter into conscious and blissful communion with such august beings. Consequently, Spiritualism and Christianity are stout opponents of Materialism, and zealous advocates of the spirituality of the unseen world. It is monstrously false to assert that "Spiritualism destroys spirituality." Those who understand it best assure us that it cultivates the highest and noblest type of spirituality.

Equally untrue is the declaration that "the practice of Spiritualism brings man into immediate communication with devils." Evidently the *Church Times* believes that devils—slanderers, calumniators, evil beings—actually exist in the spiritual world, and that those who get into communication with departed relatives and friends by the help of mediums, may unsuspectingly fall under the sinister spell of those diabolical agencies. Is not such a belief inexpressibly absurd? Are those who hold it aware of the horrible implications it embodies as it affects both God and man? No doubt, "if there are such things as evil spirits, they would certainly delight to deceive us if we put it in their power to do this"; but, surely, if devils exist they would delight to deceive us whether we practice Spiritualism or not. According to the Bible, the Devil is our adversary who, "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"; but how the practice of Spiritualism puts it in his power to injure us is more than we can comprehend.

Our contention is that there is absolutely no evidence of supernatural agency in either Christianity or Spiritualism. "Much deception and self-deception, fraud and illusion," as Mr. Myers admitted, has characterized the practice of Spiritualism, and, certainly, this is no less true of the practice of Christianity. All who have read Professor Huxley's illuminating essay on "The Value of Witness to the Miraculous" cannot be blind to the enormous amount of lying and swindling resorted to by men of God in the interest of their faith. They deceived and defrauded one another in the most audacious manner, and afterwards won profit and fame by cheating the ignorant and superstitious masses. What gross and scandalous acts of sacrilegious and burglarious robbery were often committed and piously winked at in order to secure the relics of martyred saints, and what impossible miracles of healing were nominally worked in all parts of Christendom by means of such holy remains! In connection with Spiritualism, too, lies and frauds have played a painfully conspicuous part. As a matter of fact, there is no convincing proof whatever that such a thing as psychic force exists at all. It is well known that during the last sixty years upwards of a hundred mediums have been more or less publicly exposed. Mr. William Marriott, who has made a life-study of the subject, boldly asserts and seemingly proves, in a book entitled *On the Edge of the Unknown*, that twenty media, with whom he came into close contact, were entirely fraudulent, a fact which he himself succeeded in demonstrating. Besides, the phenomena of Spiritualism, in so far as they actually occur, can be produced by merely human agency, and have been repeatedly so produced. The materialization of spirits, spirit-photography, and spirit slate-writing have all been demonstrated to be nothing but clever frauds. Many readers remember the notorious Dr. Slade from America, whose performances created such a tremendous sensation, and the fraudulent

character of which was so brilliantly and so dramatically established by Sir Ray Lankester. That swindler was followed by another more brazen-faced still, if possible, named William Eglinton. By this time the Society for Psychical Research had been formed, and several of its members were instructed to investigate Eglinton's performances. Most of them were at first completely taken in. There did not seem to be the possibility of trickery. In the end, however, the fraud was detected by Mr. Davey, one of the investigators, who afterwards successfully set up in the same line of business himself, but on the public understanding that he was not in partnership with spirits. Possibly the most remarkable feature of Spiritualism is that spirits have absolutely nothing to do with it. Not even so ardent a Spiritualist as Sir Oliver Lodge has the hardihood to report more than "long conversations with what *purported* to be the surviving intelligence" of people who are physically dead, whereas the late William James frankly acknowledged that at present we have no convincing evidence of the survival of personality.

"The Menace from Spiritualism" may be real enough to orthodox divines; but to the intellectually emancipated the menace from the Christian Church, with its enormous social influence and material interests, is incalculably greater; and this is the peril we are determined to do our utmost, by all legitimate means, to destroy as speedily as possible, in the holy name of Reason.

J. T. LLOYD.

## George Bedborough's War-Verses.

*The Bright Side, and Other Verses*, by George Bedborough. Author of *Vulgar Fractions*, *The Dogs of War*, etc. Garden City Press, Letchworth. 6d. net.

IN the intervals of such leisure as can come to a man of action who has won distinction as a man of letters, Mr. George Bedborough has sought recreation by trying his hand at verse. To him, as to other authors, there has come moods which did not seem to lend themselves to the medium of prose, lyrical moods that called instead for the help of rhyme and rhythm. Hence various poems must have accumulated, which grew in number till there were enough to fill a pretty little book.

Mr. Bedborough has been so modest in the title he has chosen, *The Bright Side*, that he disarms criticism. War has brought us poetry by the ream, and the least bellicose of our singers have been fired to eloquence by the awful spectacle of the great world-conflict. And yet, stirring as have been these calls to arms, it is for another voice that we have been waiting. That is why the dainty pocket edition of Mr. Bedborough's verse is so welcome. For in his poems there is an ever-present sense of humanity, associated with an original style and a cultured mind.

The little nose-gay of verse is noteworthy, for Mr. Bedborough sings of the War from the point of view of a Humanitarian and a Secularist. That is, he believes in war only as a last resort; but, having accepted the challenge of the aggressor, will fight with the double passion of a righteous cause. His poems are eloquent expressions of the moods of the average citizen. One would have liked a few more in the same strain as his fine lines, *A Mother's Diary*, some verses of which run:—

My boy has said good-bye.  
Sorrow and pride are mine to-night!  
Though my heart's sore, the lad is right.  
I know he heard his country's call;  
He answered, like my son, that's all:  
My boy has said good-bye.

My boy is at the front.  
 The fields at home he's left behind,  
 The fields of war he has to find.  
 No German hate could make him fight,  
 But love of England, home, and right.  
 My boy is at the front.  
 My boy is now at rest.  
 He fought, like myriads by his side,  
 Who for our honour fought and died.  
 Somewhere in France some war-worn part  
 Holds his dead body and my heart.  
 My boy is now at rest.

In quite another vein is the happily expressed poem, *What Can I Do For England?* in which a child asks the question:—

What can I do for England?  
 The country of my birth,  
 The country that I love the best  
 Of all the lands on earth.  
 Her cliffs are very high and white,  
 And very blue her sea,  
 And there isn't any other land  
 In all the world for me.  
 What can I do for England?  
 Perhaps if I'm more kind,  
 And give more love to mother  
 Now dad's left us behind;  
 If I love everybody more—  
 Even the Germans too—  
 Perhaps hate will cease and love will come;  
 I hope it will, don't you?

Some of the poems have only a distant connection with the world-war. One attractive song, entitled *Progress*, is a good example:—

Great heart of man, which all things wills,  
 Our trust is still in thee;  
 Some day thy strength, which now but kills,  
 Will move with sympathy;  
 Then love and kindness will find birth  
 In thoughts Elysian,  
 And man and all that lives on earth  
 Will find a friend in man.

It is, however, in the charming opening verses, *The Bright Side*, that Mr. Bedborough reveals himself most fully. The croakers, who tell us that humanitarianism is dead to-day, killed by the war-fever and commercialism, should read the inspiring words. Here is a verse:—

All who love weep, the best weep oft,  
 Who "see life steadily and whole."  
 They suffer, but with head aloft,  
 The anguish of the perfect soul,  
 And in hope's soil their very tears  
 Bring joy to earth in future years.

In writing these verses, Mr. Bedborough's avowed object is to awaken our sympathies, and he has done well in drawing attention to an aspect of war which has been overlooked. All readily think of the sufferings of the soldiers in the fighting line, but few think of the women and children left behind. It is not hardness of heart, but lack of imagination which prevents so many from sympathizing with the woes of ordinary folk. Mr. Bedborough's poems are inspired by an enthusiasm for humanity, and his book just now should make a strong appeal to the general reader.

Here is a poet, who, while his verses are concerned with war, yet has no love for military glory, and whose eyes are fixed on a coming golden age, when fraternity shall take the place of strife, and all men be as brothers. It seems like crying for the moon. Facts are stubborn things, and conscriptions and navies, standing armies and fleets of war-vessels seem far more likely to shape human destiny than the deserted Temple of Peace at the Hague. Mr. Bedborough has a robust faith in the future of humanity, and thinks that the darkness of midnight will give place to the brightest of dawns:—

The night seems long when hope has fled;  
 'Tis always midnight to the blind:  
 Day never dawns where hearts are dead;

Darkness ne'er leaves the troubled mind.  
 But hope will climb the Rigi's height  
 To see the dawn dispel the night.

Out of the charnel-fields of the great Armageddon of the nations, this poet sees in vision the ideal society of the future. It is precisely because his heart beats with human sympathy that his verses have a vital and permanent effect. The idea of the perfectibility of human nature is the very mainspring of his poems, and in the noblest passages the lines glow with something of the solemn and majestic inspiration of prophecy.

It is to Mr. Bedborough's credit that he dazzles us with glories beyond our reach, making us yearn for that which seems unattainable. We are captivated by the grandeur of his dream pictures of an emancipated humanity. We cannot but sympathize with his songs of the coming of that glorious day when the world shall be one country and to do good will be the only religion.

MIMNERMUS.

## Islam in Africa.

I WAS glad to see in your issue for June 11, that you have called attention to the ill-timed and uncouth criticisms of Mohammedanism made by Mr. Athelstan Riley and Canon Dale. One would have thought that a little respect and a little common decency would have been shown, at the present time, to the religion of the gallant Indians who have laid down their lives for a noble cause in Gallipoli and Flanders. But, no; the fact that Islam competes very successfully with Christianity, is sufficient to damn the religion of the Prophet in clerical eyes. Looking, as I do, quite impartially upon both cults, I utterly fail to see what good Christians hope for by converting Moslems.

It was my good fortune, during the late campaign in Tripolitana, to live intimately with both Turks and Arabs, and I was struck with the purity and austerity of their lives. I spent some weeks in the camp of the celebrated Sheikh Abdulla of Fezzan, and one might quite well have imagined oneself living in a Puritan family of the most uncompromising type. The Arabs were clean, sober, and frugal. No intoxicating liquors of any sort were allowed in the camp, and even smoking was frowned upon by the Sheikh. Prayers were said, not only at the accustomed hours, but before and after every meal—and the prayers of Islam cannot be said in the perfunctory manner of the Christian parson, but take a considerable time and involve removing footgear, ceremonial washing, and prostrating the body. Theft was unknown, and I was able to leave valuables about without the slightest fear of having them stolen. Respect was shown to women-folk, and I have seen unveiled Jewish girls of amazing beauty move unmolested amongst the Arab soldiers. Amusements were of the most innocent type, and many a pleasant evening I have spent round the camp-fire with my Arab friends, drinking tea and listening to songs and flute-playing. Never a word did I hear that could bring a blush to the face of the most innocent. Moreover, although wretchedly poor, I found the Arabs most charitable. I well remember calling, one morning, at a tumble-down tent on the desert and asking for a drink of butter-milk. It was courteously brought to me by a lad, and I rewarded his service with a small coin. I rode on for a few miles and then pulled up on hearing an Arab running behind me. Was I, he asked, the Englishman who had given his son money for a bowl of milk? I nodded assent, and he proudly handed me back the coin, saying that he could not allow his son to accept money for so simple an act of hospitality.

I found the Turks excellent fellows, too. Although exasperated by the tales that filtered through from Stamboul as to how the Christian powers were laying waste their homesteads, ravishing their women, and murdering civilians, I never saw them betrayed into any excesses. They played the awful game of war like the gentleman they are. They were moderate in the hour of victory, merciful to the wounded, and courteous to their prisoners.

Let us not forget that while during the Boer War the Mohammedans of Turkey prayed for our success, when the Balkan Powers fell upon the Ottoman Empire that shining light of Christianity, the Bishop of London, allowed prayers to be offered in his churches for the triumph of the unspeakable Bulgar and Greek.

A little reciprocation of the hearty esteem that the Turks always had for us as a nation, a little less contempt for Islam on the part of our Christian leaders, and the armies of the Sultan would be fighting on our side and not against us.

ERNEST H. GRIFFIN,

Late Surgeon to the Ottoman Forces in Western  
Tripolitana.

## Exploring the Invisible World.

### III.

(Concluded from p. 429.)

CHARLES GIBSON recalls the old school experiment which reveals the striking resemblances between sodium and potassium. So soft are these substances that a dull knife will cut them. Along the line of cleavage they shine silver-bright, although they rapidly oxidize and lose their lustre. Deposited on a damp surface, they burst into flame. Of these two elements, potassium is the more inflammable, as it blazes when dropped into a vessel of water; while sodium, when flung into water, although it decomposes the liquid and evolves heat, nevertheless fails to ignite. Part of its energy is expended in decomposing the water, but, in company with its cousin, potassium, it flames if merely deposited on a moist surface. Other examples of kinship between these metals are known already, but much remains for future discovery.

A third related elementary substance is lithium, a soft, white metal, somewhat harder than sodium and potassium. Lithium cannot be caused to ignite on a moist surface, but its relationship to sodium is shown by its capacity to decompose water and generate heat, although its inability to inflame proves its inferior energy. Resemblances and disagreements alike among this triple group signalize their kinship. And throughout the eighty odd elements small groups are to be discovered, which adapt themselves to an arrangement similar in character to that which we have just reviewed. It is unnecessary to ascertain the special properties of the various elements in order to infer their relationship. What is really imperative is to determine their atomic weights—the proportions by weight in which the elementary bodies combine to form molecules—in order to ascertain the position of the various elements in their respective family groups.

Now, when the chemical elements are arranged in the ascending order of their atomic weights, a curious regularity of succession among chemically related elements is revealed. In 1863, Newlands directed attention to this striking fact, and his discovery was elaborated by the German, Lothar Meyer, and more particularly by Mendeleeff, the eminent Russian chemist. Mendeleeff propounded the celebrated Periodic Law which declares

that the properties of an element are the functions of its atomic weight. The remarkable regularity of the recurrence of the periods is so extraordinary that the presence of gaps in the list of elements led the great Russian to predict the discovery of further elements. This prediction was fulfilled during Mendeleeff's own lifetime by the discovery, after 1870, of three new elements—gallium, scandium, and germanium. These elements filled up the gaps in Mendeleeff's periodic table, and their properties turned out to be very much what Mendeleeff had foreshadowed. This outstanding epoch in the evolution of chemistry has been further advanced by contemporary science. According to the Cambridge physicist, Sir J. J. Thomson, "the atomic weight of an element is proportional to the number of electrons contained in its atom." But it must not be forgotten that each aggregate of electrons of a given number has a definite order of arrangement. The electrons are distributed throughout the atom much as the planets are scattered in the interplanetary spaces of the Solar System, or, as Sir Oliver Lodge prefers to picture the internal structure of the atom, much as the stars are spread in the spaces of the Milky Way.

Certain of these configurations of electrons just suffice to maintain equilibrium. One of these hypothetical arrangements possesses just enough electrons to prevent disruption. If the outermost ring of electrons in such combinations is disturbed by an external influence, some of the electrons may fly off. Such escaped electrons promptly attach themselves to a neighbouring atom whose architecture is adapted to their reception. There seems to be a perpetual interchange of electrons between atom and atom. These unstable electrons have been compared to those comets which decline to pursue a stable orbit. But although this give-and-take arrangement links up the phenomena of radiation with the normal processes of electronic activity, it is to be distinguished from them. In the case of emanations such as those of radium, in which the electrons are discharged at an enormous velocity into the surrounding air, we apparently witness the atom in a state of dissolution, and this is an entirely different phenomenon to the reciprocity displayed in the amicable exchange of unstable electrons.

Now, there is evidence to prove that when an atom parts with its electrons, it ceases to maintain its antecedent electric balance. The atom's negative charge has been weakened by the departure of the emigrant electrons, while its positive charge has remained unchanged. The modified atom therefore becomes a positively charged particle, because the positive charge, in the absence of the escaped negative charge, assumes supremacy. These reduced atoms are termed electro-positive, and the larger the number of electrons they surrender, the more powerful their positive charge becomes. These results, however, are reversed when an atom has added to its original stock of electrons, for in this case the negative charge becomes the predominant partner; and the larger the number of electrons annexed, the stronger does its electro-negative charge appear. In terms of the theory, atoms of both kinds should exist, while varying degrees of both conditions should likewise be met with. These requirements are forthcoming in abundance. Atoms highly negative and lowly negative, atoms powerfully positive and weakly positive, are everyday experiences in modern chemistry.

When chemical combination occurs, electro-positive atoms enter into alliance with electro-negative atoms. This appears to explain why one strongly electro-negative atom of oxygen clutches two weaker electro-positive atoms of hydrogen atoms to produce water. "The negative charge of the oxygen atom requires the positive

charge of two hydrogen atoms to produce an electrical equilibrium. The result is a neutral molecule of water."

These considerations also explain why ordinary substances manifest no electric charge. Hydrogen atoms forming gas fail to display a positive charge. But, as we have seen, the hydrogen atoms exhibit the electro-positive charge after they have lost electrons. In their normal state, the atoms of hydrogen remain electrically neutral, but their equilibrium is upset when they come into contact with atoms of oxygen. This electronic interchange evolves the electrical charge of the atoms, and compels them to attract each other and produce molecules of water.

It must be borne in mind that these electrical phenomena are purely relative. An atom which acts positively towards one element may play a negative part towards another. The chemical compound, fire-damp, is a compound of four atoms of hydrogen and one atom of carbon. It is obvious that both positive and negative charges were involved in their chemical union, yet both these elementary bodies prove electro-positive to oxygen. Carbon will act positively towards oxygen, but it assumes a negative attitude towards hydrogen.

Both positive and negative charges are subject to circumstances, and their course of conduct appears to depend upon the environment in which they find themselves cast. A further phenomenon must now be considered. How are we to account for the fact that two atoms of the same element will combine to form a molecule? Two oxygen atoms which unite to form a molecule are presumably alike in character and condition. But there are cogent reasons for the contention that when two atoms of the same substance closely approach each other, the rapidly revolving electrons of one atom influence the spinning electrons of the other. This force generates an interchange of electrons, with the consequence that one of the atoms becomes electro-negative to the other. Thus even the combination of atoms originally alike is seen to find its explanation in the theory we have endeavoured to elucidate.

To sum up the experiences which have accompanied our journey into invisible realms. A mind-picture has been presented of the electrons—the units of negative electricity—perpetually spinning along given orbits, whose powers of repulsion are held in check by the permanent sphere of positive electricity which clasps in its embrace the whirling microcosm of electrons which constitute the atom. Larmor and Lorentz were constrained by optical considerations to advance the foregoing hypothesis as a preliminary to mathematical research. Sir J. J. Thomson afterwards isolated the electrons, and discovered that the electrons evolved in a vacuum tube were identical in mass whatever the metal or the gas of the electrodes. That the atoms of all elements are built up by different numbers and arrangements of identical electrons is unquestionably an extremely useful working hypothesis. In one of these configurations we possess the atom of carbon, in another the atom of iron, and so on. The atoms remain, and seem likely to remain, far below the limits of visibility; but the substances we daily encounter are undoubtedly all made up of a vast congregation of many, many millions of atoms.

Sodium is a soft metal, and fuses on a damp surface. Another aggregate of electrons comprises an atom of chlorine. An immense multitude of chlorine atoms constitutes chlorine gas. Now, when the atoms of sodium and chlorine combine in couples, the gas and the metal alike disappear, and common table salt, so necessary to bodily health, appears in their stead.

Thus it is evident that the theory of electrons is firmly grounded in fact. Of course, in company with

all other theories concerning the processes of Nature, it is open to amendment. With further scientific inquiry, a clearer insight than at present possible concerning the wonderful workings of the super-sensible Universe will be obtained. But the most modern additions to our knowledge of the physical world in no way countenance the misty metaphysical speculations of the occultists. Nor do they lend the slenderest support to the artful insinuations of certain theological and semi-theological obscurantists who impudently allege that the atomic theory has been reduced to ruin. Rather may we confidently claim that the doctrine of Dalton is more substantially grounded than ever, and that the contemporary electrical theory of matter—and that is what it is—no more invalidates the supremacy of scientific Materialism than the discovery that a comet's tail, instead of being a huge volume of direful substance, is, in sober truth, merely made up of intensely attenuated material, just capable of reflecting light.

T. F. PALMER.

## Imaginary Dialogues with Notable People.

### I.—The Right to Affirm.

These Dialogues are founded on experiences I and other Freethinkers have had during the past twenty years, when appearing before London Stipendiary Magistrates.

FREETHINKER (on entering witness-box, to Magistrate): I wish to affirm, your worship.

Magistrate's Clerk: Oh! Well, then, there are two grounds upon which you can affirm. First, on the ground that you have a conscientious objection to taking an oath. Second, that you are without religious belief. Which ground do you elect to take?

Freethinker: I wish to affirm under Mr. Bradlaugh's Oaths Bill, on the ground that, according to the general acceptance of the term,—

Magistrate: Answer the question.

Freethinker: I am without religious belief.

Magistrate: Are you an Atheist?

Freethinker: I respectfully submit to you, your worship, that once I have said that I am "without religious belief," the Act gives you no power to inquire any further into my belief on religion. Moreover, I submit that a court of law is not the proper place to discuss religious beliefs. I am willing to discuss my beliefs on religion with any competent person at the proper time and in the proper place, and I submit that this is neither the occasion nor the place for such discussion.

Magistrate (referring to the Act): Very well; get on with the affirmation.

Usher of the Court (to Freethinker): Hold up your right hand.

Freethinker: What for?

Magistrate (to witness): Is not that right?

Freethinker: No, your worship. The holding up of the right hand applies to a witness who wishes to take the oath in the Scottish fashion—it does not apply to the affirming witness.

Magistrate: Is that so? I don't know (referring to the Act again). Yes, I think you are right. Now, Usher, affirm the witness.

Usher: Say after me, "I solemnly and sincerely declare and affirm that I will speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

Freethinker: Stop! There are no such words in the affirmation as the last four words you have uttered. In fact, the whole purpose of the Act is to give the affirming witness the opportunity of leaving out the words of

asseveration. And I beg respectfully to protest to your worship, that although this Act has been in force over twenty years—indeed, Mr. Bradlaugh has been dead more than twenty years—here is an usher who does not know the words of the affirmation yet.

Usher: I beg your pardon.

Magistrate (to witness): Do you know the words?

Freethinker: I do, your worship; and, with your permission, I will make the affirmation myself without the assistance of the usher.

He makes the affirmation in the words of the Act and proceeds to give evidence.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

### Acid Drops.

If the *Freethinker* was a paper given to competitions, we should feel inclined to offer a prize for the discovery of the military camp in which the soldiers are burning with a newly born religion, and crying out for more chaplains. As it is, no one appears to know where they are. A "Non-commissioned Officer" writes as follows in the *Christian World* of his experience in barracks:—

I have been intensely anxious to discover, since I have been within these whitewashed walls, whether there are such signs of religious enthusiasm as may be read of in certain speeches, tracts and novels. I may as well tell the truth without any beating about the bush. The men who have religious convictions—apart from the conscientious objectors in the guard-room—keep those convictions strictly to themselves. I have only once heard the name of Christ mentioned in barracks. That was when our fiery drill-sergeant advised us to "have confidence, so that you can defy Jesus Christ Himself, as the sayin' is." In the barrack-room I have never seen a man kneel down by his bed to say his prayers. It simply isn't done. Any man who writes a tract depicting a scene in a barrack-room caused by some young hero daring publicly to say his evening prayer does not know what he is talking about. If a man chooses to kneel he will not create any great sensation; no boot will be thrown at his head, probably nothing will be said about it. But, I repeat, it isn't done here.

If "Non-commissioned Officer" looks into the subject he will find that the Bishop of London and others are only utilizing yarns that did service in tracts for years before ever the War commenced.

We should not be surprised if the clerical crusade against cinemas were associated with the tremendous decline in Sunday-school attendance. At the Free Church Council at Bradford, the Rev. Carey Bonner drew attention to a shortage of 247,592 scholars and teachers. We may yet see cinema shows in Sunday-schools; but the dear clergy will have to rack their brains to find substitutes for the Wild West films.

Mr. Edward Clodd, the veteran Rationalist, is anxious that the clergy of military age should join the Army, and adds that women are as well fitted as men for clerical work. Of course they are! Moreover, they wear petticoats more gracefully than men.

Canon Rich, speaking at a Girls' Friendly Society meeting at Liverpool, said some curious things concerning war-time economy. "I am not at all sure that it is wise to talk to our girls about how to save," he urged, "because it is not attractive." There's wisdom for you! Perhaps the Canon thinks that the girls might overlook the claims of the Church's alms-bag, and he realizes that the girls are the Church's best friends.

Conversion does not always change a man for the better. The Rev. R. J. Campbell says before the War "legislation was rapidly turning many of the poorer classes into impudent parasites." The only important piece of legislation at that time was that affecting the Old Age Pensioners, whose allowances are now worth half-a-crown instead of five shillings. It is a rare example of Christian charity to describe such unfortunate people as "parasites," who are "impudent" on

five shillings weekly—a sum which would not buy petrol for Mr. Campbell's motors.

The Church is losing its hold on the people. In spite of the ecclesiastical opposition to divorce, the Law Courts get more and more busy "putting asunder" those "whom God hath joined together." On one day recently, 112 decrees absolute were granted in the Divorce Court.

A newspaper telegram from Melbourne says there is a strong movement throughout the Commonwealth against the importation of English priests to fill Australian Bishoprics. Evidently free trade within the Empire will not extend to religion.

Stated to be a Sunday-school teacher, Herbert Mahon was at Surrey Assizes sent to prison for five years for breaking into the house of a bank manager at Sunningdale and hitting on the head with a hammer a servant girl who discovered him. The doctor stated that the girl's life was only saved by the thickness of her hair. To get rid of him the girl promised him the keys of the bank.

The North London Christian Evidence Society is appealing for £200 to purchase a motor which is "urgently needed to counteract the effect of Atheist meetings." We do not quite see the force of the appeal, unless it is intended to use the car as a battering ram. And we daresay that, properly steered, a motor van would disturb an Atheist meeting much more effectively than the arguments of the average Christian Evidence lecturer.

The Primate of the Irish Episcopal Church, addressing the General Synod recently held at Dublin, put the Providence of God on an equality with our Fleet, and attributed to their combined action their "narrow escape from the horrors of a German invasion." Even on the Primate's own showing, Providence comes off very badly, because, being itself both invisible and intangible, and alleged to be working in partnership with a material and most tangible force, there is no outward evidence whatever that it does anything at all. Poor old Providence!

The Primate admitted that the heathen were asking just now, "Why do the Christians so furiously rage together?" He replied by saying that the Japs, for example, are not in the least perplexed on the point. They realize, according to the testimony of one Bishop in Japan, that the War is "a convincing proof that civilization apart from religion is not able to save a nation, and that a civilization of culture" which rejects Christianity "is not really Christian at all." With all due deference to the most reverend gentleman, we venture to suggest that that view of the War is not the one held by the Japanese, but rather the view which the Christian Bishops and their satellites are doing their utmost to disseminate among their converts. In Europe, Christianity and civilization are one and the same thing; and what we maintain is that Christian civilization has miserably broken down. On the other hand, if Christianity has never been tried, nobody can foretell what the result of its being tried would be.

More than once since the War broke out we have referred to the contemptible part played by the clergy. They have always posed as the guides of the nation, and loudly proclaimed their indispensibility. Yet when the War came no one appealed to them for advice—no one bothered about them. And throughout the War it has been clear that their chief aim has been to get an advertisement of some kind.

While the voluntary system of recruiting was in force, the clergy were able to get some little prominence by acting as recruiting sergeants. Then came compulsion. And these black coated gentry who had been foremost in urging everybody else to join the Army managed to get their whole class exempt. Anything more contemptible than that it would be impossible to conceive. So the average man appears to be finding them out. Our weekly batch of cuttings include newspaper letters from all parts of England, and there is no disguising the contempt felt for these men who never ceased urging others to offer their lives in their country's service and

themselves hiding behind a bishop's prohibition, which they might defy with the full approval of the whole community.

There was a really funny meeting of the Canterbury Diocesan Conference the other day. One of the speakers suggested services to which the clergy should not be admitted. Another, a Mr. Hopgood, said that English people did not feel at home in church, and fidgeted to get out. Another suggested that all manuscripts of sermons should be burnt. Altogether, the poor, dear clergy appear to have been getting a warm time, and when their own followers treat them in this way they are hardly likely to command the respect of outsiders. But they are exempt from military service because they are indispensable to the nation. Oh, Lord!

The Vicar of Selby (Rev. Dr. Holloway) has discovered the significance of the War. He believes that "God is giving to Englishmen another chance." Another chance for what? We hope it is not an infringement of the Defence of the Realms Act to say that, in our opinion, even Englishmen are not worth having another chance given them at the cost of a war of this kind. We repeat that we don't know what they are to have another chance for, but we do know that if the Vicar of Selby represents the average Christian intelligence of Europe, no one need wonder at such a war as the present one existing.

Mr. Asquith has been asked to appoint August 4 as a Day of National Humiliation and Prayer. He has declined to do so on the ground that it would mean loss of time in producing war material. Work first and pray afterwards is evidently Mr. Asquith's motto.

Bishop Kaftan, of Kiel, exhorts Germans to thank God for directing German torpedoes, shells, and bombs! If there be a God, we expect he will feel under an obligation to Free-thinkers for declining to believe that he has anything to do with the directing of torpedoes and bombs, whether German or British.

Lies dies hard, and religious lies are the toughest of the species. The Mons Angels legend seems to have died a natural death, but it suggests other stories of a similar kind. The latest is that of an unnamed sergeant of the Royal Sussex Regiment, who is reported to have written to his mother:—

This morning, May 22, about 12.30 or 1 o'clock, we saw a most beautiful white cross in the sky. It sailed along until it reached the moon.

I think everybody about here saw it, and for about ten or fifteen minutes there was not a shot fired. There was absolute silence on both sides.

Everybody saw it, but only one wrote about it. The bashfulness of the majority of people in reporting these angelic visions is not less remarkable than the visions themselves.

The Rev. Lawrence Phillips, Principal of Lichfield Theological College, is an exceedingly ingenious manipulator of knotty questions. Preaching in London recently on "Authority," he contended that by authority is meant trusting the experience of somebody else instead of trusting our own experience. Then he jumped headlong to the conclusion that "to refuse to rely on authority is a proceeding which no one would contemplate outside a madhouse." We agree; but, unfortunately, the conclusion is based upon a wholly false definition of authority. Ecclesiastically speaking, to bow to authority signifies to accept the dogmas of the Church without question, or, in other words, to allow others—say the Pope and his Cardinals—to do our religious thinking for us, "a proceeding which no one would contemplate outside a madhouse."

A correspondent informs us that on some of the Military Service Tribunals some applicants for exemption are told they "are of less use than parsons." That, we should say, is about as useless as one can well be.

Writing in the *Literary Guide*, Mr. Joseph McCabe says that "Mr. Bernard Shaw holds that Christians know less

about Christ than non-Christians do." The same remark applies to other dogmas. As the witty Frenchman said, "It is so easy to believe in God if one does not trouble to define him."

The great difference between the timid English cartoons and those of the continental artists is shown by an exhibition in London of Italian cartoonists. Their work, masterpieces of satire, depicts the horrors of warfare with pencils dipped in acid. A noted example is a cartoon by Signor Bisi, entitled "Ecce Homo" (Behold the man), showing mankind tortured by warlike weapons, and with a crown of thorns of bayonets and swords.

Rev. Dr. Rentoul says that the Bible is a record of God "in loving deeds of grace and fatherly mercy, which advanced from stage to stage to its final manifestation in Jesus Christ." Quite so. We have all the butcheries and vengeance of the old Bible, culminating in the eternal damnation of the New Testament. What a good thing it is that God's ways are not as our ways.

The War, says the Bishop of Lichfield, "is God's punishment on a Europe that has cherished the war spirit." "There is a way of talking about the War being sent as a punishment for our sins which offends the conscience of the average man," says the Bishop of London. There it is! You may take your choice; but God only knows which is correct.

Canon Ross-Lewen, of Wark-on-Tyne, Northumberland, goes farther back than either of these two Bishops. He says that if Russia had held Port Arthur against the Japanese, the Russians would not have had Japan as an Ally. By helping Japan to beat Russia, the way was prepared for the alliance; and the Canon asks, "Can people not see God's hand in this?" Why, certainly. It is as simple as A B C. God knew this War was coming, and, instead of setting to work to prevent it, he, as far back as the Russo-Japanese War, set to work to arrange things so that the War should be on as gigantic a scale as possible. No wonder some of our Bishops have spoken of the War as "God's opportunity." The Russian Army, says Canon Ross-Lewin, has had "direct assistance from above." Quite so; incidentally it has also had assistance from England and Japan.

The dear Bishop of London says he hopes the last has been seen of men fingering lace and ladies' goods in the shops. "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" Drapers' assistants only handle women's clothing, but priests wear petticoats.

"Among the changes brought about by the War, he hoped one would be the passing away of the 'threepenny bit age,'" remarked a soulful speaker at the London Diocesan Conference. This looks as if religion were once more to enter the "bronze age."

In a lengthy Preface to a newly published play, Mr. Bernard Shaw damns with faint praise the early Christian ideal of share and share alike. As the first Christian Church was sold up for thirty shillings, there is little surprise that the early Christians were Communists. In these latter days, however, many people would like to "share and share alike" with the archbishops and bishops.

A bantam cockerel has been sold and resold 1,102 times, and has raised £1,553 for the Red Cross Fund. Even the cockadoodle that punctuated St. Peter's exaggerations could not have done more.

In connection with the forthcoming National Mission, a four-page pamphlet has been prepared consisting of words of one syllable. Evidently the officials think that all their readers are likely to have received their education in Church schools.

Replying to a statement made by the Bishop of London concerning the drunkenness of workmen, Mr. Ben Tillett said "the average bishop spends more on drink in a week than a working man is able to spend in six months."



### To Correspondents.

- M. E. A. MACDONALD (Johannesburg) writes: "I must add my quota to what must be a perfect chorus of praise at your admirable piloting of the dear old *Freethinker* through the present storm. I can assure you, that of all my mail matter it is the most eagerly looked forward to, and the interest never flags."
- H. MASON (Colorado).—All the books about which you write have been out of print for some years.
- CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S.—We cannot deal with lecture notices received after first post on a Tuesday morning. Your card reached us at seven in the evening and bore the post mark "9.45 a.m." of same date.
- R. J. STEWART.—We have no idea where a copy of *The Fruits of Philosophy* can be obtained.
- W. JAMES.—On the general question we fancy you are as well informed as we are; on matters of detail our knowledge is hardly precise enough. Your best plan would be to consult a solicitor.
- T. S.—Must have some sort of a signature. Next week.
- MR. E. RUMBELOW writes, *apropos* of the correspondence on "The Floral Loves of Shakespeare":—"Some old herbals describe the Spotted Orelus, *O. maculata*, under the name of 'Folston.' This is a Bowdlerized version of the older name, 'Fool's Stones.' Sir John Hill's *Family Herbal*, 1812, gives the shepherds' grosser name."
- F. PREWITT.—Thanks for article, which we have read with interest and pleasure. We have not forgotten our promise. Its fulfilment rests with you. Pleased to have your appreciation of the *Freethinker*.
- J. A. REID.—*Freethinker* handbills are being sent. We intend writing on Shaw's new volume of plays presently, but there is no immediate hurry. We agree with you as to the strange character of some of the newspaper reviews.
- A. M.—We cannot say at the moment how many priests there are in France. You have misunderstood us. We did not say the French priests joined as "non-combatants," they are there as ordinary soldiers. Glad to know that your complaint against the *Freethinker* is that you would like more. Better than feeling you have had too much.
- J. BURGESS.—Quite an amusing production. Thanks.
- B. B. BONOWSKI.—Pleased to receive your "thanks to the Editor and the weekly contributors" for their articles.
- 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.

The fourth of the open-air demonstrations will take place this evening (July 9) in Victoria Park at 6 o'clock. The speakers will be Messrs. Cohen, Rosetti, Hooper, with others. There should be a large attendance; if the weather is fine we haven't the slightest doubt but that there will be.

Last Sunday's demonstration was a pronounced success. Unfortunately, one or two speakers were prevented from attending through illness and other causes, but the meeting went well from start to finish. Mr. Rosetti made a good opening speech, with every point driven well home, and Miss Kough followed with a neat speech in defence of

freedom of discussion. Mr. Cohen spoke for nearly an hour, and by that time he felt that he had had enough, even though the audience showed a different feeling.

The agitation against the L.C.C.'s threat to stop the sale of literature in the parks is continuing, and, so far, no one has been found to say a word in public in defence of the Council's actions. At all the meetings at which resolutions have been passed, not a single hand or voice has been raised in favour of the prohibition. We fancy the Council will realize that in this case it has against it a solid public opinion. We hope to be able, next week, to report that some definite steps have been taken to effectually organize public opinion on this matter.

We have had prepared some new, and rather striking, posters advertising the *Freethinker*, and beg the assistance of our readers in getting them displayed. If newsagents can be induced to place one outside their shops, so much the better. If not, perhaps those interested will find other means of achieving publicity. A postcard to our Business Manager, stating how many are required, will bring them by return.

During the past few months we have tried advertising the paper—in a very modest way, of course—and we are quite convinced that if our finances only permitted this to be done regularly, the results would be extremely gratifying. For one thing, the local demands set up would make it easier to get the paper of newsagents, and would eventually lead to its being displayed for sale as are other papers. And given ordinary publicity, the *Freethinker* has nothing to fear. If we could only plaster the hoardings of a few towns with our new *Freethinker* poster, for instance, we fancy the consequences would be illuminating. One day we hope to launch out on a really effective advertising scheme, and then we shall see things.

The rise in the price of some of the weekly papers from a penny to twopence has commenced. We deplore the necessity for our own sakes. We are suffering from the same causes that have induced the change—one that everyone concerned with a paper makes unwillingly.

The forms dealing with the experiences of Freethinkers on joining the Army, referred to in this column last week, are now ready, and we should like early application made for them. It is desired to form as complete a record as possible, in order that the authorities may be induced to act in the matter. We hope, therefore, that all Freethinkers in the Army will apply at once for the form. A postcard to the N. S. S. General Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, is all that is required.

Unexpected pressure on his time has prevented Mr. Mann giving a further instalment of his essay on Nietzsche this week. We think we can safely promise a resumption of the articles in our next issue.

A correspondent writes:—

I am not inclined to dispute the view for which Mr. Palmer contends with so much erudition, but would suggest that surely Shakespeare was not scientific in his floral nomenclature. "Ae spark o' nature's fire," and the folklore of a district, sufficed to kindle and feed his flame. How charming is this folklore; how childish, artless, gentle, sincere, pathetic, ridiculous, profound the prattle of the gentle rustic savage, the mental and physical children of those azure mists of yesterday!

The one poor crude fact remains that in a district in Scotland the foxglove bells have been known as "dead man's fingers," and—do not laugh—the infants of my own early environ used to call them lovingly, "coo's paws" (Anglice, cow's teats). A thousand localities have a thousand different names for native flowers, etc. Herein, if you please, lies material for a charming essay or book, and which than Mr. Palmer no one would be abler to do justice. I, for one, thank him for an interesting and informing sequel to his fine article on "The Floral Loves of Shakespeare."

## Talks With Young Listeners.

### X.—A Slow Conquest.

You remember the massacre at Horeb, when the men of Levi killed so many worshippers of the Golden Calf. These Levites were now sworn men of Yahweh, and, like knights of the Order of God, were ready to defend his holy name, and curse all the "heathen" who bowed before other gods.

One day a group of Levites, clad in white, stood in a hollow, bearing a wooden box which, by means of poles or rods, rested on their shoulders. It was Yahweh's box, or ark, and people said that it contained a pot of that marvellous manna on which the Jewish nomads, or wanderers, had fed for forty years.

The hollow spot was really the bed, or channel, of the river Jordan. Of course, the river would not touch the ark, and the water on one side stood up like a wall of glass, while the stream on the other side ran off to the Dead Sea, and left the bed dry. Across this dry bed the tribes of Israel, shouting, singing, and chattering, marched with their flocks, herds, tents, and baggage. A man from each of the twelve tribes picked a boulder from the river-bed, and the twelve stones were built in a memorial pillar, or perhaps a circle of stones; and this circle, or cromlech, was called Gilgal.

The Levites came out with the ark last; and then the Jordan, with a roar, rolled on in foaming waves. No wonder the people of Israel looked with awe at Joshua, the captain who had arranged this passage into Canaan, and who was now a leader, like unto Moses.

It took many years to conquer Canaan, for the Canaanites had gods, such as Dagon with its fish-tail, Baal the sun-god, and Ashtoreth the queen of fruitfulness; and these gods fought fiercely against the Fire-god, Yahweh.

The first engagement with the natives was easy. It was the siege of the city of Jericho, on a plain rich in trees and crops. The men of Levi played a great part in it; for they carried the ark once a day for six days round the walled city, and blew horns, while Joshua and his spearmen and archers followed in strict silence, and the garrison of Jericho gazed in surprise from their ramparts. On the seventh day, the march round was repeated seven times, and then a mighty shout was raised by the invaders; the walls of Jericho fell in dust and a fearful rumbling; and the Hebrews rushed in, sacked the unhappy town, and slew all its citizens. One house, which was built on the wall, was left untouched. A red cord was knotted on one of its windows as a token of safeguard. Here dwelt the woman Rahab, who had sheltered two of Joshua's spies, and she was spared.

There was a moment of dismay when, not long after this success, the Hebrews were taken with panic, and fled from a party of natives. Joshua was furious, and assembled the whole of the people early one morning, and had lots cast to find out which tribe and which man were to blame. For Yahweh had whispered to him the evening before that a thief was in the camp, and somebody had kept for private use some of the booty of Jericho. All gold and silver ought to have been reserved for the use of Yahweh, that is, his priests and Levites.

People held their breath as one tribe after another was passed by as innocent. Then the lot fell on Judah, then on a particular man named Achan; and the poor wretch, ashen-pale and trembling, was dragged out in full view of the public.

"Yes," he groaned; "I took gold and silver from Jericho, and hid the treasure under the floor of my tent."

Messengers ran to the tent, dug up the precious metal, and showed it to Joshua and the people. They stoned Achan to death; and, for ages later, travellers who passed through a valley in that region would glance fearfully at a heap of stones and hurry on, as if in fear lest Achan's ghost should start up from the funeral cairn, where he had been flung by his angry neighbours.

On another occasion a trick was played upon Joshua, but in this case he was deceived, not by a fellow-Hebrew, but by Canaanites. These clever folk, named Gibeonites, dressed themselves in ragged cloaks, and laded their asses with patched wine-skins, and so stumbled and limped into Joshua's camp at Gilgal that he took them for a tired-out caravan from afar-off. They humbly salaamed, saluted him as a conqueror, and said they had come many, many miles to make friends with his noble highness. They showed him their mouldy bread and tattered sandals in proof of the length of their journey.

Joshua, by no means so wide-awake as usual, forgot to ask Yahweh's advice. Three days afterwards he discovered that the Gibeonites had come from villages only a short distance away. But he had sworn a pact, or agreement, to protect them, and as the treaty was made in Yahweh's name, the promise must be observed. However, the Gibeonites were made serfs, and for centuries their race was obliged to act as wood-cutters and water-carriers for the tribes of Israel, and especially for the use of the Levites of Yahweh.

In all legend there is no battle more famous than that which Joshua waged against the Five Kings. Joshua stole a march upon them by approaching their camp at night, and attacking them at break of day; and Yahweh helped with all the machinery of the sky. He pelted the Five Kings and their troops with hailstones, and held up the sun long after the proper hour of sunset, and brought in the moon to give extra light, and Yahweh fought for Israel during the long, long day. The Five Kings cowered in a cave, whence they were dragged out; and the captains of Israel put their feet on the necks of the prostrate chiefs, and the five unfortunates were then hanged on five trees.

Things went with a rush after that. Joshua fought and crushed the King of Gezer; fought and crushed the King of Eglon; fought and crushed the King of Hebron; fought and crushed the King of Debir; fought and crushed the King of Hazor; in short, thirty-one kings in all. And then the sons of Israel had a busy time sharing out the land into provinces or counties for the tribes; all except the priestly tribe of Levi; but the Levites never lacked silver, gold, furniture, or food, for they were maintained by the offerings of the rest of the nation.

Quiet settled down on the land. Joshua's battles were all fought. One day he called a great moot, or assembly, of the tribes; and the aged captain reminded them of all that Yahweh had done for them and their fathers since the days of Abraham to the conquest of Canaan; and they must choose whether to follow this God of Horeb or the enemy gods.

"Yahweh!" shouted the assembly.

Under a sacred oak-tree Joshua reared a stone pillar as witness of this national oath. Not long afterwards, at the age of 110, he died. He belonged to the tribe of Joseph. And the bones of Joseph himself, which had been carried from Egypt, were buried near the oak-tree of the great moot; and it is curious that the age of Joseph is also given as 110.

But you will notice that I set out to speak of a "slow conquest," and yet Joshua seems to have swept along rapidly in his wars with thirty-one kings. The truth

is, there are two accounts given in the Bible;<sup>1</sup> and the history, as told after the death of Joshua, pictures the Israelites as having a very uphill struggle, and for a long and weary while.

For instance, Yahweh was angry with the people for adoring other gods, and he planned that for twenty years the Hebrews should spend a miserable time, a perfect Reign of Terror, during which the tyrant Sisera ruled all the northern tribes. Sisera had a squadron of nine hundred iron chariots, and cowed the men of Israel into slavery.

A woman of spirit, named Deborah, dwelt in a tent under a palm-tree, and was so wise and shrewd that folk often visited her for advice in their troubles. She brooded over her country's wrongs, and sent for a stalwart Hebrew chief named Barak.

"Yahweh calls you," she said. "With ten thousand stout hearts you can defeat the tyrant."

The fight was fought in the valley of the river Kishon. Earth shook when Sisera's nine hundred chariots rushed over the plain, and darts and arrows flew thick. But Yahweh came to the rescue, and flung such torrents of rain from heaven that the river was flooded, and hurled the foe and his chariots in ruin towards the sea.

Sisera fled. All alone, panting and sweating, he reached a lonely tent, at the door of which a woman appeared, beckoning him to enter. Ere long he lay down. She gave him milk, and covered him, as he slept, with a tent curtain. Then she knelt, and, mallet in one hand and a sharp tent-peg in the other, drove the pointed instrument into his skull.

A poet made a war-song, and his poem of victory is perhaps the oldest portion of the Bible. It is called the Song of Deborah.<sup>2</sup> The poet laughed for joy at the storm:—

From heaven itself fought the stars,  
From their courses they fought against Sisera;  
The stream of Kishon swept them away,  
The stream, the stream of Kishon!

He praised the woman with the mallet:—

Blessed above all women is Jael,  
Above all women in tents is she blessed!  
Water he asked, milk she gave,  
Curds in a mighty bowl did she bring him.

And the end of the song is this shout:—

So perish thine enemies all, O Yahweh!  
But be thy friends as the sun when he rises in power.

You see that in those days of old, life was a fierce struggle both for gods and men.

F. J. GOULD.

### Critical Chat.

CHARLES LAMB: SOME PHILISTINES AND A TRUE BELIEVER.

It is, or should be, one of the principal dogmas of a rationalistic creed that every Freethinker who is worth his salt confess himself a whole-hearted worshipper of Charles Lamb. Like the chosen people of old, he may for a time forsake the way of the righteous, and in the chamber of imagery set up an altar to some false and outlandish deity. He may fall down before an image of wood and brass like George Borrow; he may spend hours of hedonistic meditation before the rose-embowered and wine-bedrenched shrine of some Eastern wine-god, before an Omar Khayyam, translated out of honesty into English; he may even find spiritual comfort in the worship of miniature deities that are as beautiful as mayflies and as ephemeral, of a Wilde or a Robert

Buchanan. But at long last, if only the rationalistic savour has not gone out of him, he will return to the god of his fathers, the god of every genuine lover of fine letters—to Charles Lamb. And Lamb, too, has this in common with the Jehovah of the Israelites, that those whose duty and pleasure it should have been to worship, have sometimes turned away and blasphemed in their hearts and with their lips. Our British Ezekiel, Thomas Carlyle, cursed him with all the splenetic bitterness of an ill-tempered dyspeptic prophet because *poor* Lamb did not set much store by the "eternal verities"; because, having no German and depending on indifferent translations, he saw nothing in Goethe's *Faust* but a trumpery story in verse of sorcery and seduction, no better than the sentimental and melodramatic balderdash of a Kotzsbue. It may, or may not, have been a deplorable miscarriage of critical judgment; but, anyhow, it was not a bit more deplorable than Carlyle's critical estimates of Comte, Mill, or Keats, judgments as futile as indecently absurd, as anything written by the most ignorant scribe on the daily or weekly Press. "Poor Lamb! Poor England, when such a despicable abortion is named a genius." Poor Carlyle! Poor England! one may retort, when the blatant and virulent detraction of a scrofulous Scot is mistaken for criticism! And Carlyle was not the only blasphemer. Another publicist, in whom some of his admirers would have us see a latter-day Carlyle, Mr. Frederic Harrison, confessed some while ago that for him Lamb was a *poor creature*, a ne'er-do-well like Goldsmith, Sterne, and De Quincey, but, withal, worthy of admiration in virtue of his unfailing charm. For my part, I don't know that this kind of supercilious praise, with its sub-flavour of condescending pity, is less irritating than unqualified brazen detraction. Indeed, there may be some of us for whom it is more irritating, coming, as it does, from a writer whose literary judgments are not always as sound as they might be. When Mr. Harrison was asked to say what precisely he meant by *poor creature*, he was hard put to it, and ignominiously took shelter behind the not very imposing figure of Canon Ainger.

This was not a very wise thing to do, because there was very little of the cleric in Lamb, and the parson type of mind has always taken up towards him an attitude of imperfect sympathy. I have often wondered how Ainger could ever have got his reputation as *the* authority on Lamb. The only competent editor of Lamb, Mr. Wm. Macdonald, whose death a few months ago leaves a wide gap in English literature, suggested wittily that "in the forming of these special reputations, as in the building of a planetary world, it is wonderful what a small amount of solid matter, or initial merit, will serve as a nucleus to begin from; gravitation doing the rest in one case, and what Dr. Johnson called 'repercussion by idiots' in the other." Although there are editors far more intelligent and sympathetic, Ainger is still the official, the only authority as far as the general public is concerned. If I am dissatisfied with the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and turn to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, I am still faced by the dapper little cleric. If I fall back on the more brilliant and more democratic *Chamber's*, I have the misfortune again to meet with Ainger; and the official biography in a celebrated series, *English Men of Letters*, is by the same person— from whom, seemingly, there is no escape. He is recommended to you by all your illiterate friends until he becomes a nuisance, and then you are set on the right track possibly by reading that Swinburne thought him a fussy little fool, or by finding out that, in his edition, he exercised over the works of Lamb a sort of moral censorship, which is peculiarly objectionable to

<sup>1</sup> The Book of *Joshua* relates the swift conquest; the Book of *Judges* tells a different tale.

<sup>2</sup> In *Judges* v.

the least parsonified of writers. "Ainger even permits himself," says Mr. Macdonald,—

at certain points, to cut the Author's text according to the Editor's taste. Not to speak of certain little Biblical episodes which he has struck out of the Dibdin Letters, for instance—things very far from even a colourable charge of impiety, though they might have seemed to be touched with an unbecoming levity had they appeared, say, in a published letter by Canon Ainger himself—he excludes from Lamb's works altogether a number of excellent pieces which the world will, I fancy, by no means consent to let die.

This fastidious and ultra-decent parson, with his purely sectional taste in literature—a taste certainly not Lamb's—excluded a long prose paraphrase of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Cupid's Revenge* because, presumably, the subject was not refined enough for the young ladies for whom Lamb did not write; for another reason he excluded *The Reminiscences of Juke Judkins*, an excellent study of low life and sordid characters, which, although a fragment, has a very real value. *Unitarian Protests* is a paper in which Lamb argues against the habit of Unitarians of having themselves married in accordance with the ritual of the Established Church (for the sake of legalizing their offspring), and then handing in a written protest against the doctrines to which they have been forced, with sense, to appear to subscribe. He tells them it is their duty to accept all the risks, and put up a fight to the death as the Quakers did, and so win for themselves the victory of civil freedom. The Canon thought it advisable to omit this paper in his edition. Then, again, there is *A Vision of Horns*, which I cannot imagine as bringing even the ghost of a smile to the prim lips of the virtuous Canon. He found this universal subject an unsavoury one. I cannot do better than give Mr. Macdonald's comment, which will meet the approval of every virile mind:—

It is a subject (he says), this of the attribute or addition, symbolized as certain external, albeit usually invisible, frontal ornamentations, which many a good fellow is believed to wear, unconscious of his honours, and owing the same less to his own merit than to the selective enterprise, the extravagant and, so to say, extra-domiciliary kindness of his modest helpmate—it is a subject which, somehow, is felt to be genial and endeared, curiously cognate to humanity and good humour, when both are sound enough at heart to indulge safely in a spice of pleasant malice. This unsavoury subject was Shakespeare's prime favourite among all good jokes. To it would his wholesome and happy mind revert, how often! to rest there for the space of a smile, at least, and sometimes long enough for a full, oceanic commotion of mirth, a perfected soul-delivery of Falstaffian laughter. The spirit of Lamb had been drenched in that sunny sea of Shakespearean naturalism and elemental purity of regard, and it is small wonder that he had some motions of his own one day to prolong the ripple of that secular, but that in an especial sense Elizabethan *joyuseté*. He had not, however, reckoned with the Victorian era, then coming on.

I hope the quotations I have given above will send every lover of Lamb—and who among Freethinkers is not?—to the "Works of Charles Lamb," edited by Mr. Macdonald, in twelve delightfully printed volumes, and published by Dent & Co.

#### SHAKESPEARE ONCE MORE.

It requires a good deal of courage and not a little ambition to make Shakespeare, the myriad-minded Shakespeare, the central figure of a dramatic action. In such an attempt, a failure which is not fatuous is something only just short of success. I remember reading some while ago a play by Mr. Frank Harris, *Shakespeare and His Love*. Mr. Harris is an amazingly clever man.

In his play he shows us Shakespeare as a clever man frantically in love with an aristocratic demi-virgin of the Court, a Mary Fitton. But it is not the Shakespeare we know that struts across the stage, firing off his pop-gun witticisms and parading his amorous disillusion. It is really Mr. Harris, who has mistaken his own temperament for that of Shakespeare. He certainly saw some points in the poet not revealed so clearly to other men, which is natural enough, because we all find in a writer no more than what we bring to him. The play was, however, a failure through lack of the creative warmth of imagination, and an excess of cleverness.

Now, cleverness is, I am pleased to say, not the outstanding quality of a little play I have just been reading. It is called a chronicle play in two scenes, and is by Mr. Wilfred Blair (B. H. Blackwell, Oxford; 1s. net). The first scene is the Parlour at New Place, Stratford, and the characters the members of Shakespeare's household, who are waiting the arrival of Burbage, Drayton, and Ben Jonson, to see the last of their old friend. The characters are differentiated with skill, and their talk has the true ring of genuine emotion. The second scene is the Death of Shakespeare in the Great Bedroom at New Place. Mrs. Shakespeare and Mrs. Hart are watching by the bedside, gossiping over family matters, when the poet, whose mind is wandering, lives through in memory the whole of his wonderful life. It is as moving and as beautiful a piece of work as I have seen for many a long day. Mr. Blair's conception of the poet's philosophy of life and death is an eminently sane one. He made Shakespeare talk of going, not to Abraham's bosom, but to his friend Marlowe, the reputed Atheist. He says to his son-in-law, Sir John Hart:—

Well, John, an' thy philosophy prove true,  
Kit Marlowe shall re-greet me soon.

Hall: I hope

You shall re-greet us too in Heaven. Nay—

Shakes. (smiling): My thought was rather Hell.

He dies with peace in his heart, kind words on his lips for all around, and in his mind the memory of the fat knight, the godless Jack Falstaff, the most perfect conception of his brain, the very epitome of human nature. Heaven-wafted on the wings of a merry jest, he passes over into that country from which no traveller returns.

GEO. UNDERWOOD.

## Correspondence.

### "SCIENTIFIC HISTORICAL MATERIALISM VERSUS METAPHYSICS."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In your issue of July 2 Mr. A. E. Cook offers a fresh statement of the doctrine called "Historical Materialism." With this new and more guarded statement I am not inclined to quarrel. My object in this correspondence is not to refute "Historical Materialism," but to deny the alleged opposition between it and what Mr. Cook vaguely denounces as "metaphysics." With this object, I pointed out in my former letter the fact that human institutions are conditioned and influenced by economic development does not exclude the influence of ideas, any more than the fact that my decision to take a walk is influenced by the weather excludes the equally true fact that I go out because I want to. Conditions act on ideas, and ideas react on conditions.

I turn to Mr. Cook's successive challenges to me. First, I should say that a Freethinker can quite consistently deny "free will," in the anti-determinist sense, and continue to advocate Freethought, for the reason pointed out in my first letter, *viz.*, that the word "free" is used in different senses. The religionist advocating "free will" uses "free" in an *absolute* sense, *i.e.*, that of "free from the necessary chain of cause and effect." In this sense, nothing is free, whether thought or any other process. The advocate of

Freethought, on the contrary, uses "free" in a *relative* sense, as "free from certain particular influences," *i.e.*, religious dogma and legal and social pressure. It is obviously in this sense that the word "free" is nearly always used in common language. Mr. Cook, I presume, permits himself to speak of a prisoner being set "free," without feeling any scruples as to possible metaphysical implications. Why should not Freethinkers, in a similar way, aim at setting thought "free" from the prison of creeds and confessions? Does Mr. Cook want to taboo the word altogether?

Secondly, as to the supposed opposition between Kant and Darwin, I fail to see how one affects the other. Darwinism, *i.e.*, the theory that the human species has differentiated itself from the common animal stock under the influence of the struggle for existence and the survival of favourable variations, leaves the Kantian problem just where it was before. Certain forms of knowledge, such as mathematical knowledge and the law of causality (on which the whole of Mr. Cook's own theory depends) *cannot*, as Kant (and Hume before him) pointed out, be deduced from experience; and this applies equally to our own experience and to our remote ancestors, so that evolution does not help us here. Such judgments are therefore properly called *à priori*. The first man who perceived that changes in nature must have causes arrived at that perception, not from experience, but from the power inherent in him of grasping such truths. The point of development he had reached doubtless *evoked* that power; it cannot have *implanted* it. How then did he possess it? My own answer to that question is that the undeveloped faculty of knowing is latent in all nature, and in man as part of nature; but this, obviously, cannot be properly set forth in a letter.

Mr. Cook's fundamental mistake, I submit, is to think that metaphysics is a sort of cloak for religion. It has too often been made so; it is more essentially so than mathematics or logic. Spinoza, Schelling, Schopenhauer, and, among living men, Mr. Belfort Bax, are metaphysicians who are very far from being religious. On the other hand, the "pious pseudo-scientists" to whom Mr. Cook alludes (Sir Oliver Lodge for instance) make their mistakes just because they are not sufficiently metaphysicians to see what mere verbosity their apologetic arguments mostly are—witness their antiquated opposition between "mind" and "matter," and the like. The worst of Mr. Cook's position is that it really lends itself to the purposes of such bunglers, who, starting from a one-sided conception of "Materialism," sooner or later flounder into an equally one-sided and even more absurd "Spiritualism."

ROBERT ARCH.

### Pernicious Pars.

Our special correspondent, Mr. Slimyglide, who recently reported upon the enormous success of the Religious Tract Society's propaganda among the troops, witnessed a remarkable spectacle last Sunday. He stood, with note-book in hand, at the corner of the Leaford Camp just as the morning Church Parade commenced. He noted immediately the terrific majority of Church of England soldiers who marched in solid masses towards the bough-tree Army Church. Of course, there are other denominations among so vast a quantity of soldiers. This must be expected, but let us not depress our readers unnecessarily—the other denominations only made up *one small squad*—composed of three Wesleyans, two Roman Catholics, one Presbyterian, one Congregationalist, and a Quaker converted to the Baptists, of which latter there were three. This squad marched in the opposite direction to the vast army of the Church of England soldiers. Upon an inquiry, our Mr. Slimyglide was informed that the Jews are exempt from Church Parade, but they have to remain behind in their huts and clean the rifles of their Church of England comrades. This is as it should be. Mr. Slimyglide was afterwards entertained by the Army Chaplain, at whose magnificent residence he had the pleasure of dining.

—Church Clutter and Canteen.

There can be no possible doubt whatever that one of the most alarming manifestations of the War is the steadily

increasing number of blasphemous "Atheists," "Agnostics," and so-called "Freethinkers." Not only do these monomaniacs attack Holy Writ, but they have the audacity to idealize Shakespeare, quote the poets, exploit the immortal genius of Shelley, Keats, Swinburne, etc., and generally lay waste and devastate the pathways of the sublime. But, in spite of this sinister and deplorable phenomenon, let the Church take heart, one thing is certain—all the "Freethinkers" in the world cannot stop the War; they are utterly impotent; in this fact lies our only real hope, and we humbly thank God for it.—*Verger's Vanguard*.

No more wonderful development of the War can be imagined than the stupendous effect not only upon the Church, but also upon the clergy, of the stern necessity of utilizing every ounce of physical strength during the present crisis. We are shortly publishing a series of photos of well-known divines who have responded to the Nation's call. We propose, each week, to give photographic representations of these divines who have taken up special branches of menial industry in order to relieve the national strain. Next week we shall publish the first, which will depict the Very Reverend Josiah Fatback handing a large piece of coal to an ineligible coalman. This piece of coal weighed exactly four pounds and a-half (a very fine lump), and, when the ineligible coalman flung it into his truck, he noted that the Rev. Fatback's hands were slightly soiled. Upon this being pointed out to him, the divine smiled brightly, and wiped his hands upon his black trousers. There cannot be too much of this fraternalizing; it paves the way to a permanent good feeling between the classes, and will lessen the amount of social unrest which must inevitably follow upon the declaration of peace.—*Christian Cataplasm*.

The Vicar of St. Allsop's has arranged a series of living tableaux to take place very shortly at the church. (Weather permitting, D.V.) He has enlisted the most enthusiastic members of his slowly diminishing congregation, and these faithful few have promised to support his idea for bringing fresh blood into the church. The first tableaux will be seen next Sunday, when the congregation will arrange themselves in the shape of certain letters upon the roof of the church, forming the first line of well-known hymns. Photos for the daily papers will be taken from an aeroplane. This is a most ingenious idea and we conjure the Churches generally to extend the possibilities of it.—*Christian Contortionist*.

ARTHUR F. THORN.

### God.

LOATHLY thou broodest o'er the corpse-strewn field,  
Where strong men in their throes have bit the sod,  
And shattered fragments of thy image yield  
A noisome banquet for thee, bloody God!  
Yea, thou dost lap the blood and crunch the bones  
Of shell-torn thousands mangled in their prime;  
And mockest their poor widows' piteous moans  
That rise to thee, to thee, thou God of Crime!  
Eke dost thou batten on the fætid stench  
From No Man's Land on laden breezes borne,  
Where 'twixt the British and the foeman trench,  
Putrescent heroes moulder all forlorn.  
For thou hast never had thy glut of blood,  
Since kings fought kings three thousand years ago;  
Insatiate thy maw, till this red flood  
From Europe's fields in rivers 'gan to flow.  
"All-merciful and ever-present God,"  
To thee priest-ridden Christians humbly pray,  
The while thou haunt'st the gore-encrusted sod  
And suck'st with greedy lips the crimson clay.  
Glutted at last, thou curse of every age,  
Soon shalt thou sink in unregretted death,  
And, loosed for ever from thy bloody rage,  
Another world arise, untainted by thy breath!

K.

**SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.**

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

**LONDON.**

**OUTDOOR.**

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 6, Freethought Demonstration. Speakers: Chapman Cohen, Rosetti, Hooper, and others,

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 6, R. Miller, a Lecture.

FINSBURY PARK N. S. S.: 11.15, Percy Wilde, a Lecture.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (corner of Ridley Road): 7, F. Schaller, "Christianity on Trial."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill): 3.15, Miss Kough, a Lecture.

REGENT'S PARK N. S. S.: 3.15, E. C. Saphin, a Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (outside Maryland Point Station): 6.45, Miss Kough, a Lecture.

**COUNTRY.**

**OUTDOOR.**

GLASGOW (Jail Square): 3.30, R. Ogilvie, a Lecture.

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