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Views and Opinions.

National Mission Leaflets.

From a number of correspondents who are good enough to act as Freethinker literary scouts I have received copies of the handbills distributed by the National Mission of Repentance and Hope. And anything more stupid than these leaflets it would be impossible to conceive. As intellectual efforts an average thirteen year old schoolboy might well be ashamed of their production. They are dominated by the same appeal to a "conviction" of sin that governs the thinking of the most ignorant of Salvation Army preachers. They are inconceivably crude, and glaringly ineffectve. They are too stupid even for quotation, since their absurdity could only be illustrated by a complete reprinting, and we have much better use for our space. If Bishop Welldon requires proof of his statement that the clergy of the Church of England are not intellectually capable of dealing with present-day difficulties, he has it in abundance in these tracts. Unless it be that the whole thing is a plot, and they are not issued by the clergy, but by their enemies. Dean Swift once broached the theory that all the bishops in Ireland were disguised highwaymen. He knew, he said, that the English Government always sent wise and virtuous men to act as bishops, but, he added, they never arrived. And he concluded that on the journey to Ireland they were waylaid by highwaymen who murdered these good men, donned their clothes, and then officiated in their stead. So, I think, it is a plausible theory that these tracts are not written by the clergy at all. Somewhere there may be a society of wicked Atheists who are issuing them as from the National Mission in order to impress the British public with the conviction that the ranks of the clergy are filled with individuals fitted only for an idiot asylum. If this theory be true, the work is being done with extraordinary efficiency.

The Good Old Times.

But against this theory may be urged the utterances of distinguished clergymen who are working in connec-

tion with the Mission. And many of their speeches fit the tracts like the other half of a pair of scissors. One might hold either that the speeches are based on the tracts or the tracts are derived from the speeches. To take the prince of these mental ineffectives—I had almost written defectives—the Bishop of London. He tells us that the nation's sin is that it has forgotten God—which is really no excuse for God forgetting the nation. He is as full of talk of "sin" as any of the tracts, with special outbursts against sexual vice and drink and "lecherous" plays. If we listen to the Bishop on the War we are a nation of heroes, gloriously unselfish, fanatically devoted to the object of winning freedom and right for the whole of Europe. If we attend to him on the Mission we are deep sunk in vice, as corrupt as it is possible for us to be. Quite recently he said that London was less "godly" to-day than it was a hundred years ago. On this the *Observer* drew his attention to the fact that a hundred years ago a private soldier received 550 lashes in a public park, a woman was sold for 2s. at Colchester, there were shiploads of women convicts being sent to New South Wales, there were one-eighth of the population in receipt of poor-law relief, there was bear-baiting and cock-fighting. And we may add there was the English factory system, under which children of seven years of age were being murdered to fill the pockets of pious factory women, and women were working in mines, nearly naked and harnessed like horses to coal trucks. As a redeeming feature, it may be pointed out that the Prince Regent—that very moral gentleman—had no less than 115 chaplains. * * *

Godliness versus Morality.

It must, however, be pointed out in defence of the Bishop that he did not say London was more moral a hundred years ago than to-day, only that it was more godly. And in that he was quite correct. There had been the great Wesleyan revival, and the evangelical movement was in full swing. The Church of England was also experiencing a revival, and the clergy were extremely active, and fairly successful, in engineering prosecutions against those who sold Paine's *Age of Reason* and other Freethought works. There was no compulsory education, and the clergy still ruled whatever schools existed. The Sunday Acts were in full force. Catholics, Jews, and Freethinkers were legal outlaws. Parliamentary seats were openly bought and sold, and the masses of the people were ignorant, drunken, and powerless. Decidedly England was more godly a hundred years ago, and we can understand the Bishop thinking the present time degenerate. England was then more godly, but less moral. And if it had remained as godly it would never have grown morally better. * * *

Our Irresponsible Parsons.

Why do the Bishops, and the clergy generally, talk in this extraordinarily ineffectve and fundamentally untruthful manner? For it is ineffectve, as results show; and it is untruthful, as is admitted by the speakers them-

selves, when pressed. It is really not dangerous for an unprotected girl to walk in the streets of London, nor is it true that theatres and music-halls are full of lecherous plays. There are, of course, men and women of loose character about the streets, and there are plays that people may be shocked over if they are built that way. But when all is said and done, the pictures are overdrawn, and the preachment fails to effect reform. Why, then, is this attitude so characteristic of the clergy? Partly, it is due to tradition. It is extraordinary how little the character of clerical preaching alters. Generation after generation there is the same story told, with a variation of names only. In substance there is nothing the clergy are saying now in the shape of moral exhortation or denunciation they might not have said a century ago, nothing that was not said a century ago. Partly, also, it is due to the lack of a sense of responsibility. There is really no class of the community so irresponsible as the clergy. There is no one able to call them to account. The M.P. has a check placed upon him by his constituency. The statesman is checked by public opinion at home and abroad. The author must refrain from grossly insulting the intelligence of his readers under penalty of losing them. Even the newspaper writer has the fear of his editor and his daily readers before him. But there is no one to call the clergyman to account. He knows that his own congregation will be the last to find fault. And criticism by those who are not of his congregation will serve only to endear him to his supporters. So the general public neither look to the clergy for guidance nor expect from them exactitude of statement. The result is a wildness and inaccuracy and extravagance of speech such as would shame even a politician into privacy and lose a penny-a-liner his bread-and-butter. The last man in the world to give a careful and accurate statement of fact is a clergyman.

* * *

Calculated Ineffectiveness.

The ineffectiveness of these missions is admitted. Not only admitted, but expected. I venture to say that there is not one person in a thousand, and not an intelligent person in ten thousand, who expects that this National Mission will have the slightest influence in really cleansing or purifying our national life. For all that the Mission is able to do, everyone of the evils about which the Bishop of London has talked so wildly and so vaguely, will be as active and as great when the Mission is over as it was before it commenced. And, let me emphasize it, no one expects anything else. The Bishop says he is "out to save the working-class daughter." Is it only the working-class daughter that needs saving? If it is, does it not strike one that the real way to save the working-class daughter is to remove the conditions that press so heavily upon her? And what does the Bishop say about that? Simply nothing at all. It might be dangerous to his class if he did say anything worth listening to. He wants a purer London for the sake of "our boys in the trenches" by the time they come home. Those poor, delicate, timid, modest boys in the trenches, whose sensitive souls will be so stricken when they return! Could anything be more ridiculous? Would anyone be so ridiculous except a parson and a Bishop? People do not drink without a cause, girls do not sell themselves without a cause, "lecherous" plays are not produced except to gratify a taste that does not exist without a cause. And what word has the Bishop of London ever said against these causes? Has he ever seriously attacked the question of overcrowding, of London ground landlordism, of underpaid labour, of defective education? What has he ever said or done to open up more rational and educative influences than those of which he complains? And what is the net

value of all the talk about sin and purity? They are all so many attempts—often calculated attempts—to divert attention from the real issues. The need of the nation is not repentance, but intelligence. It is not a softening of hard hearts we need, but a hardening of soft heads. Low plays will only be cured by an improved taste; the craving for drink by the creation of healthier appetites; the ending of a traffic in human bodies by better housing, better education, and better paid labour. Fantastic posturing with shepherds' crooks will only serve to perpetuate these things. And yet the shepherd's crook is suggestive. The Bishop is the shepherd, and the people are his sheep. And it is the fate of sheep to be sheared annually for the profit of their owner.

* * *

There are other aspects of the Mission, with which I will deal next week.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Pulpit Arrogance.

ONE of the published sermons of Dr. G. Campbell Morgan is entitled "The Wages of Sin; The Gift of God," the text being the well-known verse, "The wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans vi. 23). Early in the discourse the following statement occurs:—

The wages of sin is death. That is a fact from which there is no escape. I care nothing for your philosophy. I care nothing for your scientific view of the universe. Here is the fact, and all philosophy and science agree with religion in the accuracy of the blunt statement. The wages of sin is death. To break law is to die.

In that short extract we see the arrogance of an ignorant pulpit at its lowest and worst. Only two sentences in it are true, and they only reflect dishonour upon the preacher. No public speaker has a right to care nothing for philosophy and science; science, in particular, being the only source of information on the subject in hand. Death is not the wages of sin, and had Dr. Morgan heeded the unmistakable evidence of the science of geology, it would have been impossible for him to endorse such a falsehood. Death is an inexorable law of Nature, from which there has never been a door of escape. Paul was fundamentally mistaken when he affirmed that death entered into the world through sin. Whether sin be a reality or not, or whether it ever entered into the world or not, the fact is incontrovertible that death was an every day event countless ages before man appeared. Was it the wages of sin then? Animals and plants all died before the human race began to be. And yet Dr. Campbell Morgan has the audacity to declare that death is the wages of sin, and to claim both philosophy and science as supporters of his irrational view. If he condescended to consult well-attested facts, he would be heartily ashamed of his stupid dogmatism. The man who cares nothing for science at this time of day, and insults the public by assuming the role of teacher, is a charlatan of the lowest order. One only laughs at him when he boasts that his "purpose is to get business done for eternity," and pities those who are silly enough to take him at his own valuation.

Equally absurd is the contention that God bestows eternal life, as a free gift, upon those who are willing to receive it. Eternal life is a theological dream, which, believers are solemnly assured, can safely be treated as an ascertained fact. Of the existence of such a life there is no evidence whatsoever, though Dr. Morgan talks about it as if it were the best-known of realities. He knows as well as we do that it is nothing of the kind.

The Gospel Jesus defines it as consisting in the knowledge of God and himself; but God is an object of faith, not of knowledge, while the Gospel Jesus is a non-natural man that never existed save as an idea. No knowledge of either is in any sense or degree possible. The people who declare that they have eternal life differ from other people only in their colossal credulity. They are, on an average, neither better nor worse than their unbelieving neighbours. They die like all others, and so far as any evidence to the contrary is concerned, that is the end of them. Probably, Dr. Morgan cares as little for evidence as he does for scientific information, as the following definition of eternal life clearly indicates:—

Eternal life is life that is of all the ages; it defies the touch of death, and realizes the ultimate meaning of God in the creation of a soul. That is the free gift of God. I cannot earn it. I cannot buy it. I do not deserve it. But blessed be God, I can have it as a free gift.....Sin is the rejection of the gift. It is the sin of unbelief. No man who has ever heard the Gospel will be condemned to death here or hereafter, for any specific sin. He will only be condemned to death here and hereafter because he rejects God's gift.

We must admit that Dr. Morgan's loyalty to Scripture is perfect, but it is at the expense of disloyalty to reason and history. He knows of no life that is above the touch of death. The only life of which we possess any knowledge is subject to the law of death, and we confidently challenge the reverend gentleman to adduce the slightest proof of the existence of any other life. His dogmatism proves nothing but the desperate credulity of his hearers.

In another sermon, "Grace Abounding," Dr. Morgan contrasts sin with grace, holding, with the Apostle Paul, that "where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly" (Romans v. 20). By grace he means that "in God which is love and power, working for others, without reference to their deserts." The thought which the preacher wants his hearers to grasp is that grace is infinitely more powerful than sin, and destined to destroy it. What is sin? "Spiritual dislocation, the spirit of man out of harmony, out of relationship, with God, not adjusted to him; it is spiritual rupture issuing in moral wrong, and finally expressing itself through the physical, and issuing in all the pains and penalties of spiritual, moral, and physical suffering." Assuming the accuracy of that definition of sin, we naturally ask, Where and wherein has grace ever shown its superiority? If "the history of the race is the history of the increase of sin," where are we to look for the conquests of the more than super-abounding grace of God? Grace, as defined by the preacher, has been in the world from the beginning, and in a superlative degree ever since the beginning of the Christian dispensation; but the following is the confession which Dr. Morgan is bound to make:—

To-day sin abounds, sin multiplies. We have never lived in an hour when we so perfectly understand this apostolic declaration. We look out upon the world to-day, and what do we see? The absolute failure and break-down of all human wisdom, of all human philosophy. The wreckage in Flanders is the expression of the ruin of human cleverness.....What does it all mean? The persistence of selfishness. That lies at the root of the whole trouble. Never was there a day when these things were more manifest than to-day.

That is an obvious subterfuge to which the preacher resorts in desperation. What the War demonstrates is not "the folly of human wisdom," not "the ruin of human cleverness," but the total failure of grace to triumph over what the preacher calls sin. The War is an irrefragable evidence of the victory of sin over grace, an incontestable proof that God's righteous government of the world is a gigantic farce. Of course, Dr.

Morgan, who believes in the absolute and invincible sovereignty of God, will not admit this, and puts the blame not upon the weakness and inefficacy of Divine grace, where it really lies, if his theology is true, but upon the alleged folly of human wisdom. We agree with Dr. Morgan that the cause of the War is wholly human, but differ from him absolutely as to the relation of human wisdom and human cleverness thereto. The cause of the War is human greed and lust for power, the struggle for national existence and territorial aggrandizement. The nations engaged in it are believers in God, whom each side claims as supreme Ally and guarantee of victory; and innumerable appeals for victory go up to him from both sides. It is certainly not true that we are "being compelled, in the circumstances in the midst of which we are living, to the confession of the folly of human wisdom." Had wisdom prevailed, had reason been on the throne, we are convinced there would have been no war. Furthermore, had what Dr. Morgan calls grace been a reality, and had it super-abounded, the War would have been impossible. As a matter of fact, Divine grace does not count, has never counted, in the formation, extension, and rivalries of different kingdoms, and prior to the outbreak of the present conflict, the higher attributes of humanity were in a state of suspension, while political ambition and jealousy were in full evidence. In any case, the God of justice and love has been conspicuous only by his absence and inactivity, a fact that goes far towards proving his non-existence.

Dr. Morgan is an exceedingly popular preacher, and it seems as if his popularity has brought an oracular, arrogant note into his teaching. He speaks with an authority which nothing but infallibility could justify. He claims to know what, in the nature of things, is utterly unknowable. He admits that "for the moment we can hardly see that grace super-abounds," but he asserts that "grace is operating powerfully in the midst of things most terrible." That assertion is unsusceptible of verification. The truth is that what we see is not God ruling over the world, but humanity struggling upwards, but often slipping backwards; not Christ reigning in righteousness and love, but man slowly acquiring the art of living a life of brotherly affection, but frequently giving way to the mood of lion and of ape still lurking within him. The present War is a reversion to the barbarism he was supposed to have permanently left behind. As God's offspring, mankind is a woeful failure; but as a product of evolution, it presents glorious possibilities and most encouraging promises.

J. T. LLOYD.

Freethought and Literature.

(Concluded from p. 676.)

III.

Speedy end to superstition, a gentle one if you can contrive it, but an end.—Thomas Carlyle.

ENGLISH prose, no less than the poetry, is saturated with scepticism. The greatest of our historians, and one of the greatest of all historians, Edward Gibbon, was uncompromising in his attitude towards Christianity. In the famous fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of his monumental *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, he strips bare the pretensions of the clergy, and shows plainly the purely naturalistic origins of the Christian superstition. James Boswell rightly described the *Decline and Fall* as containing "much artful infidelity." Byron said that Gibbon "sapped a solemn creed with solemn sneer," but Gibbon is never dull. Witness his delightful account of the Christian knight who, "as the champion of God

and the ladies (I blush to write such discordant names), devoted himself to speak the truth, maintain the right, and protect the distressed." Of the military orders of St. John and the Temple he says, "They neglected to live, but they were prepared to die." Towards religions Gibbon's attitude was that portrayed in Tennyson's *Palace of Art*:—

I take possession of man's mind and deed,
I care not what the sects may brawl,
I sit as God holding no form of creed,
But contemplating all.

Although a dignitary of the Church, Jonathan Swift was, to all intent and purpose, a sceptic, and it has been said that his known views barred his way to a bishopric. Voltaire, no mean judge, considered *The Tale of a Tub* as casting ridicule upon the Christian faith, and it is truly a formidable indictment of orthodoxy. *Gulliver's Travels* expresses such a scorn of the human race, with its Lilliputian littleness and its Brobdingnagian coarseness, that its author could not have sympathized with a religion with such emotional claims as Christianity. Perhaps the surest indication of his irreligion is found in his striking verse on the Day of Judgment:—

Ye who in divers sects were shammed,
And came to see each other damned
(For so folks told you: but they knew
No more of Jove's designs than you).
The world's mad business now is o'er,
And Jove resents such pranks no more.
I to such blockheads set my wit!
I damn such fools! Go, go; you're bit.

Few writers have suffered more for their opinions than Thomas Paine, whose claims as a writer of prose have been consistently ignored by generations of critics. His *Age of Reason* and *Rights of Man* were judged harshly because of their unpopular opinions, but their literary charm is undeniable, and there is much finished grace of imagery and metaphor. Even Edmund Burke himself might have envied the brilliant illustration of his own too exclusive compassion for the sufferings of the aristocracy in the great French Revolution. "Mr. Burke pities the plumage, but he forgets the dying bird." Shelley, a wise and discriminating critic, thought this so excellent, that he used it as part of the title of one of his own political pamphlets.

Not less antagonistic to orthodoxy was the attitude of Thomas Carlyle, one of the predominating intellectual figures of the nineteenth century. In his *Life of Sterling* he lays bare much of his own Freethought, which, like that of Paine and Voltaire, had a Theistic tinge. Carlyle was certainly heterodox, as in his outbreak:—

Pantheism, Potttheism, Mydoxy, Thydoxy, are nothing at all to me; a weariness the whole jargon, which I avoid speaking of, decline listening to.

His jokes at "Hebrew Old Clothes" and "The Exodus from Houndsditch" show his real attitude clearly, and he is quite explicit in his gibes at the ritualistic tendencies of the Church of England:—

The Church of England stood long on her tithes and her decencies; but now she takes to shouting in the market-place, "My tithes are nothing, my decencies are nothing; I am either miraculous, celestial, or else nothing." It is to me the fatallest symptom of speedy change she ever exhibited. What an alternative. Men will soon see whether you are miraculous, celestial, or not. Were a pair of breeches ever known to beget a son?

Two of the most popular writers of the century, Charles Dickens and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, were both Unitarians, and, from the orthodox standpoint, are outside the Churches. Dickens was never tired of tilting at religious humbug in his works, and his "Pecksniff," "Stiggins," and "Chadband" prove his aloofness from the ordinary point of view. Per-

sonally, Dickens had a strong aversion from dogma, and described himself as "morally wide asunder from Rome," while of Puritanism, in all its shapes, he was an uncompromising opponent. Of mission work he had little good to say:—

So Exeter Hall holds us in mortal submission to missionaries, who (Livingstone always excepted) are perfect nuisances, and leave every place worse than they found it.

Later novelists have embodied much thoughtful scepticism in their works, and George Gissing, Eden Phillpotts, H. G. Wells, and George Moore have each contributed to the transformation of public opinion.

Looking beyond our own country, we find French literature one blaze of splendid scepticism from Abelard to Anatole France. The debt of civilization to France is incalculable. The French writers spread far and wide, not only through their own country, but through the Western world, the claims of Reason and Humanity. Indeed, by their insistence on the right of free opinion, unhampered by the Churches, they established once for all that spirit of freedom whose full import is only just beginning to be understood. The bead-roll of French Freethinkers is a splendid one, containing as it does the names of Montaigne, Rabelais, Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Victor Hugo, De Musset, Baudelaire, Leconte de Lisle, Sully Prudhomme, and a perfect galaxy of lesser geniuses. In Germany, Goethe, Schiller, and Wieland were "intellectuals," and Heinrich Heine, the most brilliant of them all, was the most daring of iconoclasts. He hated priestcraft with a perfect hatred, and directed the bolts of his unerring irony at the heart of the Christian superstition. He never wearied of pouring scorn on "the molly-coddle homœopathic soul doctors who pour the thousandth part of a pint of reason with a gallon of morals, and send people to sleep with it on Sundays." He loathed that "abortion called State religion, that monster born of the intrigue between temporal and spiritual power." His most blasphemous jest was his last. "God will forgive me," he said, "it is his trade."

Freethought is in evidence in Italian literature in the works of Leopardi, Guerrini, Carducci, and Gabriele d'Annunzio. In Hungary, Imre Madacli, and in Sweden, Snoilsky, Geiger, Braun, and Gyllenborg, attuned their lyres to the inspiration of Liberty. Priest-ridden Spain produced Espronceda, Bartrina, and Curros. Holland boasts among her Freethinkers Eduard Dekker, Genestel, and Coornhert. Portugal claims Nascimento, and Maurice Maeterlinck, the Belgian Shakespeare, has embodied much scepticism in his delightful books. Norway's importance in literature is due, mainly, to Henrik Ibsen, the iconoclastic playwright, who has changed the course of the world's drama. The tyranny of the Greek Church failed in Russia to silence Lermontov and Pushkin, and the audacities of modern scepticism were anticipated in the Eastern world by the Persian singers, Omar Khayyam, Hafiz, and a whole choir of poets.

America has produced, in Walt Whitman, the poet of democracy. "The tan-faced poet of the West" was as unconventional in his views of religion as he was unlike other singers in his verse. *The Song of Myself* is the most complete utterance of Whitman's superb egoism:—

Nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is.

For forty years Mark Twain filled the English-speaking world with laughter, and beneath his quaint drollery was concealed partially one of the sanest writers of our time. A thorough Freethinker, he was, in his day, the most eminent man of letters in the United States, and his career was a large asset of national

pride. Another great American, Ralph Waldo Emerson, championed mental freedom with such grace and distinction that Matthew Arnold pronounced his essays "the most important work done in prose" in the nineteenth century.

The clergy are always asserting that Christianity has the support of the most intellectual of the men and women of the European races. This claim is so preposterous that it would be amusing, were it not for the underlying Jesuitry which does not hesitate to make religious capital by assertions of the most impudent character. Freethought has wrested so many positions from Christianity that, in order to present an appearance of having some little weight of authority to support the tottering edifice of superstition, believers will hesitate at nothing to drag in some really great writers with whose names and influence they hope to buttress the wavering allegiance of their lukewarm fellow-Christians. How far from the truth the contention of the clergy is may be seen by rapidly glancing over the names of those writers who were never more conspicuous than in their interpretation of Freethought. The weapons used by the clergy are poisoned ones. When the Freethinker is alive, they assail him with all the vituperation which their practised tongues know so well how to use. If, in spite of their abuse, he gains fame, then they claim him as one of their own followers. Shelley and Burns have gone through both processes. Swinburne has been through the first, and will, when the verdict of time verifies his greatness, go through the second phase. Like vultures which feed on corpses, so does the Church of Christ fatten her waning reputation on the dead bodies of her opponents.

MIMNERMUS.

Pagan and Christian Morality.

To those who are versed in pagan lore, it appears very strange that Christian writers invariably represent the scraps of morality, religious doctrines, and religious practices, taught by Jesus, as then new to the world; and that they would have us believe that before his time, there was among men no morality either taught or practised, which, in rectitude and purity, bore any comparison to that which he taught, but that all the world lay in utter moral darkness. This, however, was not the case. Long before his time, there were, not only individuals, but whole communities of men, quite as moral and virtuous as any that we find for at least fourteen centuries after his time. Among heathen nations, we find moral philosophers whose writings abound with moral sentiments far more elevated than any attributed to Jesus. In the history of these heathen nations also, we find that justice, benevolence, and all other moral virtues, were exercised to a very high degree. Nor could it have been otherwise; for no community of men can long exist without the exercise of virtue. To teach men that it was for their benefit, both individually and collectively, to shun vice and practice virtue, required no revelation from heaven. This they were daily taught by experience and observation—the grand sources of all knowledge. Even if the morality which Jesus taught had not been previously inculcated, still there is nothing clearer than that every sound precept which he enunciated could be discovered by man, without any supernatural aid. If he had revealed the operations of those laws of nature—which, in his time, had not been discovered by scientific men, and many of which are still undiscovered, but the knowledge of all of which, nevertheless, is indispensable to the happiness of mankind—he would have done something towards promoting the happiness of future ages. But he neither revealed nor discovered anything either moral or physical. All that he taught had previously been taught by such men as Thales, Solon, Pythagoras, Confucius, Socrates, Plato, the Brahmins or Gymnosophists of India, the Peripatetics, the Stoics, and others; so that it would be no difficult task to show that everything taught in the Gospels had been previously advanced in very similar words to those which Jesus is said to have used.—*Evan Powell Meredith (once a Baptist minister), "The Prophet of Nazareth" (1864), p. 423.*

It is held by the vast majority of Christians that just

before the birth of Christ the world was sunk in a state of moral depravity never before approached—except, perhaps, at the time of the Deluge, when things were so bad that the Heavenly Father was obliged to drown his children like so many kittens. In fact, it was so bad that God, the Almighty, could devise no remedy but the heroic sacrifice of his only begotten Son—if he had been merely a good human father, he would have sacrificed himself; but as is well known, "God's ways are not as our ways," a fact to be profoundly thankful for.—Moreover, it is also held that Christ revealed a new moral law; that his teachings are far superior to that of all the moral philosophers who preceded him; and if it had not been for his advent, the world would have been utterly lost in sin and iniquity; that Jesus was indeed the "Light of the World"; that he revealed a moral code so high and so perfect that the heathen world would never have discovered it by the aid of merely human intelligence.

The moral teaching of Christ is the last trench in which the Christian takes his stand from under the fire of modern criticism. He challenges his opponents to find any flaw in the moral teachings of Christ, and emits a cloud of poison-gas against the Pagan morality and civilization which ruled the world before the birth at Bethlehem.

Our purpose is to show that the moral teachings of Christ were not new; that they were well known and taught hundreds of years before the Gospels appeared; also that many of the teachings of Jesus are very far from being perfect, some of them atrociously bad, and others altogether impracticable.

Even the much-belauded "Golden Rule," "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (Luke vi. 31), which most Christians regard as containing the very pith and essence of Christianity, was well known and taught hundreds of years before the time of Christ by nearly all the religious reformers and philosophers known to us. We append a few of them.

Zoroaster.—Prophet and reformer of the Persian religion, seventh century before Christ:—

Hold it not meet to do unto others what thou wouldst not have done to thyself: do that unto thy people, which when done to thyself, proves not disagreeable to thyself (Gate the 31st of his Sadder).¹

Thales.—Greek philosopher. Born 644, died 548 years before Christ. When asked how we may best and most justly live, he said: "If that which we blame in others, we never do ourselves."²

Kleoboulos.—One of the seven wise men of Greece. Born 634, died 564 years before Christ: "What you hate, do not to another."³

Solon.—Athenian lawgiver. Born 638, died 538:—

When he was asked how men could be most effectually deterred from injustice, he said, If those who are not being injured feel an equal indignation with those that are.⁴

Confucius.—Chinese philosopher, founder of "Confucianism." Born 551, died 478 years before Christ:—

Tsze-kung asked saying, "Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?" The Master (Confucius) said: "Is not reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others" (*Confucian Analects*, xv., 23).⁵

Dr. Legge, in his article upon Confucius in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, observes:—"It has been said that he only gave the rule in its negative form, but he

¹ Cited from the learned anonymous work, *The Gospel History* (1873), p. 116.

² Keningale Cook, *The Fathers of Jesus* (1886), vol. i., p. 153.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 244. The name is also rendered Cleobulou.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 239.

⁵ Max Muller, *Physical Religion*, p. 359.

understood it also in its positive and most comprehensive force." That is, that we should not only *abstain* from doing that which we should not like others to do unto us; but we should *do* to others that which we should like others to do to ourselves.

General Forlong says of Confucius:—

The Golden Rule, which only appears once in the teaching of Jesus, he reiterates three times, as in *Doctrine of the Mean*, xiii. 3. *Analect*, v., xi., xv., 23, and again in his *Great Learning* (com. x., 2), where he exhaustively expands it as: "The principle with which, as with a measuring square, to regulate one's conduct."¹

Buddha.—Indian philosopher, founder of Buddhism. Lived in the sixth century before Christ:—

Do unto others that which ye would have others do to you (*Sutra of Forty-two Sections*, v. 129).

The Mahabharata.—The most ancient of the Indian sacred books. Compiled five or six centuries before Christ:—

Let no man do to another that which would be repugnant to himself; this is the sum of righteousness; the rest is according to inclination (*Mahabharata*, xiii, 55, 71).²

The Panchatantra (iii. 103-4) another Indian sacred book, teaches the same rule:—

Hear the sum of righteousness, and when thou hast heard, ponder it; do not to others what would be repugnant to thyself.³

Isocrates.—Athenian orator. Born 436, died 338 years before Christ, tells us that Nicocles, King of Cyprus, when addressing his governors, tells them:—

You should be to others what you think I should be to you (*Nicocle*, t. i. 93).

Isocrates himself advised children to:—

Be such towards thy parents as thou shalt pray thy children shall be towards thyself (*Ad Demon*, c. 4).

And again:—

That you would be such judges to me as you would desire to obtain for yourselves (*In Aeginet*, c. 23).⁴

Plato.—Greek philosopher. Born 429, died 347 years before Christ:—

Thou shalt not take that which is mine, and may I do to others as I would that they should do to me (*Plato's Works*, Jowett's translation, vol. v., p. 483).⁵

Rabbi Hillel.—A learned Jewish teacher. Born fifty years before Christ:—

Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. This is the whole Law, the rest, merely commentaries upon it.⁶

Deutsch, the brilliant Hebrew scholar, says that this rule was "quoted by Hillel, the president, at whose death Jesus was ten years of age, not as anything new, but as an old and well-known dictum 'that comprised the whole Law.'"⁷

Sir William Jones, the learned Oriental scholar, who was not an unbeliever, observes: "Christianity has no need of such aids as many are willing to give it, by asserting that the great maxim, that we should act in respect to others as we would wish them to act in respect of ourselves, as the rule is implied in a speech of Lysias, expressed in distinct phrases by Thales and Pittacus, and I have seen it word for word in the original of Confucius."⁸

¹ Forlong, *Short Studies in the Science of Comparative Religions* (1897), pp. 320, 321.

² J. Muir, *Religious and Moral Sentiments from Indian Writers*, p. 24.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ See Ramage, *Scripture Parallels in Ancient Classics*, p. 182. *Antiqua Mater*, p. 134. Clodd, *Pioneers of Evolution*, p. 48.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁶ Max Muller, *Physical Religion*, p. 357.

⁷ Deutsch, *Literary Remains*, p. 27.

⁸ Sir William Jones, *Tenth Discourse before the Asiatic Society*.

The Roman Emperor, Alexander Severus, thought so highly of this maxim that he ordered it to be written up in the Palatium and on public works. Although Severus lived after the time of Christ, he was a Pagan, noted for his virtues and his justice.

W. MANN.

(To be continued.)

Acid Drops.

Ben Tillett's criticism of the clergy at the recent Trade Union Congress has provoked the Bishop of Salisbury to retort. In the current issue of the *Diocesan Gazette* his lordship says:

It is useless to argue with men who start from a denial of what lies at the basis of all spiritual work—namely, that "man cannot live by bread alone," and that those who are maintaining the religious life of the country, ministering to thousands of sufferers, and bringing consolation to thousands of homes, are doing, in the highest sense, national work, and no more deserve this unfair criticism than the young doctors, the civil servants, the munition workers who are making their own contribution to the national cause, and are admitted to be doing valuable and necessary national work.

It is because these men who attack the clergy do not consider that spiritual work is necessary or even important, because their utterances represent a materialism as real, though different in its form, as any other, that it is useless to argue with them, though profitable for ourselves to ask why it is that the forces of religion have failed to bring men to a better mind. They make it clear, at any rate, that the materialistic spirit is not the monopoly of Germany.

The Bishop misses the point, which is that exemption depends on indispensability. The classes he names are specialists, they are doing something that nobody else does do, with the exception of certain lower grades of civil servants, who, by the way, are *not* exempt as a class. Doctors and munition workers are indispensable in this crisis—but all of them have not been exempt—and can it be maintained that bishops and clergy are? The Bishop talks of their ministering and consolatory functions, and do not let us forget the work they do; but are they doing this work better than anybody else is doing it, so much better by comparison that if their work ceased there would be an insufficiency of ministering and of consolation? The question answers itself, and it brings us to the point that the manifestation of mere humanity in non-combatants—the Bishop, of course, calls it spirituality—had not received even exemption; it has not even secured exemption from further combatant service for men who—like the Salisbury curate V.C.—risk their own lives in the saving of others. They have still to fight on. Unless, therefore, the clergy can prove absolute indispensability, they are no more entitled to exemption than any other avowed dispensable section of the community, and most of them of military age do not want to be. For their claim for exemption will be difficult to justify on the moral grounds of sincere conscientious objection to war. Have the clergy lived up to that status which has conferred exemption on the much-abused conscientious objector? who, by the way, have had precious little support from bishops and clergy. Parliament has hastily assumed that as clergymen are *ipso facto* war haters and men of peace, and has conferred exemption on them on this basis.

As a matter of fact, many of the clergy have never said a word against any war, they have claimed that this is a righteous war, they have been its apologists and supporters and recruiters, and to do them justice, have longed to be in it if young enough, and if too old, have largely officered the Navy and Army from their own families. However much this gallantry has enhanced their reputation for patriotism, it cannot but have shattered their claim for exemption from combatant service, because it exhibits such a complete exchange of faith in spiritual force for reliance in physical force. And an observant nation cannot allow their excuse that this is what Christ would have done in the circumstances, because it was just what he didn't. Had bishops and clergy preached

against war and worked against war and kept clear of the Army and Navy in the pre-war period, they would now have had some real ground for pleading exemption. Even if the world had paid no heed to their wise counsels for the supersession of force and hate and aversion as a solvent of international troubles, by the saner and humaner process of reason and respect and toleration, then, at any rate, their own consciences would have been clear, and the nation would have admired them. But they have been dumb on the immorality of war and vocal on its morality, and on the disciplinary value of military service. It is the perception of their inconsistency which stirs the widespread feeling which Ben Tillett has kept on voicing. If the Bishop will look at the matter from this point of view he will see, indeed, that the materialistic spirit is not the monopoly of Germany, nor of the laity in this country, but that our episcopal and clerical brethren have so much of it that it is impossible to connect a world less satisfied with it to the religion they profess.

Reynolds' "Watchman" sends the following open letter to the Chaplain-General of the Forces:—

DEAR BISHOP,—I wish you Reverends and Right Reverends would give poor old Britain a rest for a while. You seem to think that every day is the Day of Judgment, and that you are the judges. "If God had a controversy with Israel in the days of old, I think he has one with England to-day. He could charge us more than He could Israel with sin and ingratitude." Tut—tut, man! Don't be so dogmatic as to what is the Deity's attitude and sentiments. We British are so accustomed to being called rotters by our pastors and masters that we are in danger of believing that we are as black as we are painted.

Certainly Britain would be greatly improved if the Bishops would cease from fussing and the clergy take a rest. But if they ceased fussing, the people would soon ignore their existence; and they know that as well as we do.

Mr. H. G. Wells, the novelist, is fast becoming a religious man. So far he has only found one God—and popular prejudice runs in favour of three—but we have hopes. In his latest book he pokes fun at an Atheist's wife who nourished her baby in a drawing-room at unseasonable times, and so lavishly. Perhaps he prefers religious women who pass their lives in convents.

Mr. H. G. Wells has not only found "God," but he has also discovered Adam and Eve. In his latest novel he says, "It was probably Adam in his first conversation with Eve who discovered the pleasantness of dropping into a confidential undertone beside a pretty car with a pretty wave of hair above it." Mr. Wells forgets, however, that Adam was conversing with his own "rib," and thus he was only talking to himself after all.

The Bishop of London is just now surpassing his own reputation as the utterer of silly sayings. Speaking in Hyde Park the other day he said: "Fellow Churchmen and Churchwomen, we have come out here to fight. We have first to fight in argument." But his lordship is notoriously incapable of arguing. He can only assert, dogmatize. Replying to those who characterize the National Mission as unpatriotic, he delivered himself of the following amazing statement:—

The National Mission is not unpatriotic. The Church has led the recruiting of the nation. Altar servers, Scouts, Church Brigade lads were the first to go. The clergy have given their sons in thousands, and eight bishops' sons have died in the great cause. Three chaplains have been killed, and fifteen wounded between July and September.

Assuming the truth of all that, it surely does not prove that the National Mission, carried on while the War is in full blast, is in any sense whatever patriotic. And there is the outstanding fact, which cannot be ignored, that the bishops have unpatriotically opposed the enlistment of all clergymen of military age. We maintain that the holding of a National Mission at the present time is an act of gross disloyalty to the cause which the country is believed to have so much at heart.

The Bishop of London does more harm to the Church than an army of critics, and if his colleagues were wise they would suppress him. Recently, the Bishop, seeking to defend the attitude of the clergy on the War, said three chaplains had been killed and fifteen wounded. Just so! But there are 50,000 parsons, and what is this little service among so many.

A "Command Performance" of the National Mission was given at Buckingham Palace on October 20. The King and Queen, with all the "household and their servants"—the distinction is interesting—were present, and the Archbishop of Canterbury preached on Repentance and Hope. Probably by the time he had finished many were full of repentance for having attended, and of hope that they wouldn't be asked to come again.

Half the front page of the *Christian* for October 12 is taken up with a frenzied appeal for funds for the Soldiers' Christian Association. People are asked to subscribe because "of the eagerness with which they (the soldiers) are thronging to hear the Gospel." This is the first we have heard of the rush. Others have been content to say the soldiers were willing to hear the Gospel. The Christian Association goes one better. The soldiers are "thronging" to hear it. This will certainly be news for the Army.

Religion up to date is exemplified in the building of a Wesleyan chapel, at Southall, with plush tip-up seats and a cinematograph apparatus. The chapel cost £24,000, and, provided the cinematograph is kept active enough and the parson kept quiet enough, we should not be surprised if it is well patronized.

A delightfully humorous advertisement in a daily paper reads, "Nursemaid wanted to take charge of two children age twenty-three or over." It recalls the childhood of the Old Testament patriarchs.

The clerical mind, like its God, is past all understanding. The Bishop of Chelmsford said recently, with reference to the National Mission, that the nation "ought to repent because of the shortage of men" for military service. The only considerable body of men who are holding back are the clergy, of whom there are 50,000 in the country.

Some of the clergy of the Church of England, aided by some officious persons, are making a dead-set at the modern theatre, which they pretend is "immoral." The fact remains that the "immoral" theatrical profession raised £110,000 for the blinded soldiers, whilst the "moral" clergy only seek to exploit the Army and Navy.

The Vicar of Windsor has been protesting strongly against the "unclean stage." What purists the clergy are! Doubtless, the reverend gentleman regards the story of Lot and his daughters as suitable reading for children.

In an interview, published in the *Daily News*, Dr. John Clifford, formerly minister of Westbourne Park Chapel, London, who recently celebrated his eightieth birthday, said: "I was brought up myself to believe implicitly in the literal date of the Creation—4004 B.C. The Garden of Eden was as real to me as the Garden suburb is, and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil as the apple-tree in my grandmother's garden. We have passed safely through all that. Of course, the geologists and Darwin did much." This is a frank admission of the changed views regarding the Bible. Did not Bradlaugh say that religions did not die, but they were transformed?

We never care to place much dependence upon statements made by clergymen. It is not so much that they deliberately tell untruths as it is that, from a traditional recklessness of speech, they seldom trouble to ascertain what the truth is. Hence there is one statement delivered by Prebendary Durham at Plymouth, on October 15, on which we should like evidence. He asked his audience, "Did they know it was true that girls in factories were told how they could

increase their wages?" Such advice may be given to some, of course; but the whole inference from the statement is that it is a general plan, and that we do not believe for a moment. And the purpose of the exaggeration is obvious. Prebendary Durham was preaching on behalf of the National Mission, and the rawhead-and-bloody-bones style of thing is adopted in order to prove how necessary the Mission is.

Sir W. Robertson may be a first-class soldier, but we hope we shall not make ourselves liable to be charged with doing anything prejudicial to recruiting, if we say that on theology he is as ridiculous as the Bishop of London. Indeed, it was to the Bishop that Sir William wrote, "I am old-fashioned enough to think that the great War, like those of which we read in the Old Testament, is intended to teach us a lesson." "Intended"! Obviously by God. Then why blame Germany? God brought about the War to teach us a lesson. The world was plunged into war for *our* benefit. The conceit equals the absurdity of it. We would strongly advise Sir William to stick to his trade. Still, there is a sense of fitness in selecting the Bishop of London as the recipient for such a piece of absurdity.

Honesty in the Christian pulpit is almost as rare as charity. There are clergymen not a few whose private views differ essentially from those which they avow and teach in public. There are real Atheists among them who professionally champion Theism, and non-Christians who make their living by preaching the Christian Gospel. Such conduct is mean and despicable in the extreme; but there are those who will do anything for the sake of the loaves and fishes. Professional hypocrisy is far more common than many people imagine.

The Archdeacon of Port Elizabeth calls attention, in the *Church Times* for October 20, to another species of professional dishonesty. Dr. Wirgman, though strictly loyal to the Catholic Creeds, is by no means a narrow-minded theologian; but it puzzles him completely how such men as Canon Rashdall, who holds Unitarian tenets, can conscientiously remain in the Anglican Church, which is founded on Trinitarianism, and he calls upon them to imitate the honourable example of the late Mr. Stopford Brooke, who, as soon as he discovered that he could no longer accept the Creeds, voluntarily retired from the Anglican ministry. The Archdeacon forgets, however, that the clerical conscience is, as a rule, very conveniently elastic, and that there is a remarkably realistic sense in which honesty is *not* the best policy.

The street shrines of London are growing in number every day. In South Hackney there are nine, and near Regent Street six. The Queen has visited some of them, and the ha'penny papers have published pictures. Another step towards Barbarism and the Middle Ages.

Only a small percentage of the population attends places of worship, yet the newspapers persist in catering for the minority and ignoring the growing claims of Rationalism. The Bishop of London gets as much attention as a music-hall artiste; Billy Sunday gets columns devoted to his quips and cranks; and General Booth gets fulsome praise for his "imitation" army. The "free" press of England is the hugest of jokes.

"The children of Israel were set free after the sacrifice of the first-born. So will the peoples of Europe be set free after the sacrifice of their sons." This sounds like the *War Cry*, but it appeared in *London Opinion*, which is usually considered a comic paper. It seems a fitting place, however, for such out-of-date ideas.

The *Church Times* is horrified at the use of bad language by officers and men in the Army, and has published some letters on the subject. One correspondent says that "a large number of the fellows in my battalion who use this blasphemous and obscene language are ex-Church Lad Brigade and Sunday-school fellows." An unexpected result of religious education.

The Chelmsford Diocesan Board of Finance has voted £15 for a new heating apparatus. Is it to be used in the place so often mentioned in sermons?

Twelve years ago a Cistercian monastery was established at Martin, near Fordingbridge, Hants, the monks having shifted over here in order to anticipate the French authorities, who were about to expel them. Being French subjects still, they have now been sent for by the authorities, and the place will, practically, be closed down. They are needed to replace members of the Order who have fallen in the fighting or are otherwise engaged in the War. This makes the claim of the Anglican Bishops for exemption of their men all the more peculiar.

The *Daily News* Parliament man has told the world of a new Peace move. A fresh series of prayers has been drawn up for use in the House of Commons, and is now in working order. The same authority informed us some time ago that the attendance on these occasions was "two or three," a highly significant number. Quality, therefore, should be sufficient if quantity is lacking.

Mr. J. Reed, in his just published *The War in Eastern Europe*, has the following of the Serbians:—

Truly an indomitable people, with a spirit which is perhaps best exemplified by the story of the Serbian Bishop Duchitch and the Bishop of London. Have you heard the story? No? Well, they dined together in England.

"You are fortunate," said the Bishop of London, "in your people. I am told they are very devout."

"Yes," replied Mr. Duchitch, "in Serbia we do not trust too much to God. We prayed God five centuries to free us from the Turk, and finally took guns and did it ourselves!"

There is not much difference in respect to the fact between the Serbians and ourselves. The only distinction lies in the greater candour and straightforwardness on the part of the Serbians.

The Rev. R. J. Campbell has some pointed things to say about the Nonconformists in his new book, *A Spiritual Pilgrimage*. He says that the Free Church ministers are business managers and salaried directors of an institution. Just so. And if Mr. Campbell will take the trouble to examine the work of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, he will find that "business" has its place in the Government religion also.

A good story is going the rounds of the American press. A German-American was boasting of what the Central Powers had done, and he concluded by saying, "You see, God has not deserted the Kaiser." The American's eyes twinkled, "Great Scott! But the other fellows have England, France, and Russia."

A telegram from Milan tells of the fall of a statue of the Madonna from the facade of the cathedral, which, in spite of the descent of 100 feet, remained erect and unbroken. "This," adds the message, "is regarded as a favourable omen." The Catholic mind must, we think, be childlike and optimistic.

The new Lord Mayor of London, Sir William Dunn, is a Catholic, and the third to fill the chair since the Reformation. The first was Sir Stuart Knill, who was elected in 1893. This shows the slow growth of toleration in an Empire where Christians hold the reins of government.

The Bishop of Chelmsford has been described by a gushing pressman as a "religious democrat." One swallow, however, does not make a summer. The votes of the bishops in the House of Lords show that the right-reverend fathers-in-God behave as religious aristocrats.

The old Biblical ideas concerning polygamy are still in force among the Turks, but this sacred custom has its drawbacks in modern civilizations. How terrible to think that one little bullet can make three hundred widows when it hits a Turk with a harem stocked as Solomon liked it.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

October 29, Barrow-in-Furness; November 5, Brixton; November 12, Glasgow; December 10, Leicester; January 14, Nottingham; February 4, Abertillery.

To Correspondents.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—October 29, Sheffield; November 12, Brixton; November 19, Birmingham; December 31, Abertillery.

SOUTH LONDONER.—You were quite right in protesting to your representative on the L.C.C. against the prohibition of the sale of literature in the parks. We should like to see thousands of electors following your example.

S. LIDGETTS.—Your interest in the paper is very gratifying. Many of our readers adopt the same plan as yourself as a means of furthering our circulation.

S. M. (Dulwich).—Very pleased to learn that the *Freethinker* is so much appreciated by you and your friends.

F. S. GILBERT (U.S.A.).—Thanks for New Orleans paper. Such plain speech about Thomas Paine is indeed calculated to open the eyes of the very pious.

T. WOOD.—Order handed to Shop Manager. The story you send is a good one, but it has already been used in the *Freethinker*. We hope to visit Belfast again, one day.

H. R. WRIGHT.—Received, and shall appear as soon as possible.

Y. C. (London, S.W.).—Article on "Peace" received, and will try and find room at an early date.

DR. B. DUNLOP.—We have forwarded your apology to Mr. T. F. Palmer, with your warm appreciation of his articles and letter. We are quite sure that the frank and courteous character of your communication will be greatly appreciated by him.

S. S. LEECH.—The Bowman Case is still in dispute. An appeal against the Judgment of the Court of Appeal has been lodged, and we must now await further developments. But our confidence in the final result remains unshaken.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—C. E. Hearson, 10s.

N. S. S. GENERAL FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—C. E. Hearson, 6s.

J. PARTRIDGE.—Pleased to learn that Mr. Willis had such a good audience on Sunday last.

L. MARSHALL.—Sorry; both are out of print. One may be reprinted later.

A. J. COTTLE.—Pleased you have such a high opinion of Mr. Cohen's *War and Civilization* as a propagandist pamphlet. From our Business Manager's report we learn that others are of the same opinion, and are giving it a wide circulation.

J. SMITH.—Thanks for cuttings.

COLLETTE JONES.—Thanks for congratulations on "the continued excellence of the *Freethinker*." We hope we shall always be generous to Christians, without sparing in the least the Christian superstition.

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

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.

Our Fight with the L. C. C.

We hope that our readers, and London readers in particular, have not lost sight of our fight with the London County Council over the sale of literature in the Parks and Open Spaces. There is every promise of the question being brought to an issue in the near future, and we are writing now in order to enlist the active support of Metropolitan Freethinkers—and, if possible, others.

It was hoped, by both the National Secular Society and the Joint Committee formed for the purpose of fighting this question, that the Parks' Committee would see its way to reconsider its decision and permit the old arrangements to continue undisturbed. That arrangement—which gave the Council the right to veto the sale of all objectionable literature has worked with the utmost smoothness, and no complaint of its working is alleged by even the Council's own officials.

In the circumstances it was hoped that after the deputation of London Societies which waited on the Parks' Committee, the latter body would have seen the wisdom of refraining from further interference with so well established a right of public propaganda. We now have reason to believe that the Parks' Committee, at a recent meeting, decided by a majority of one to prohibit the sale of literature, and to decline to recommend the rescinding of the Council's resolution at its meeting on Tuesday next, October 31.

The fight is, therefore, to go on. It has, indeed, been going on, without theatrical display, and with effect. During the whole of this month Branches of the N. S. S. have held their meetings as usual, and literature has been sold. Names and addresses have been taken, and we presume the L.C.C. will appeal to the Courts to enforce the decree. But others may appeal to the Courts also, and the L.C.C. may find that it is invoking a weapon which may be turned against itself.

We refrain from saying more upon that head now. We know that London organizations feel deeply upon this matter, and also that members of the L.C.C. have been inundated with protests from their constituents. That is a good thing. It is well that these elected gentlemen should know what their constituents think of their doings, and we hope that all who have not already protested will do so without delay. Remember, the Council meets on Tuesday next, and all letters of protest, to be effective, should be sent to members before that date.

We cannot say more than this for the moment. The N. S. S. Executive meets on Thursday (Oct. 26), and the matter will then be further discussed. But its general course has been decided already. It will resist to the uttermost this fresh attack on the freedom of public meeting. And in that resistance it may feel assured of the united support of all Freethinkers.

CHAPMAN COHEN, *President N.S.S.*

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Cohen's meetings at Sheffield on Sunday last were of a very promising character. Both afternoon and evening the hall was comfortably filled, and there is no doubt that friends in Sheffield are very anxious for a more energetic propaganda. Unfortunately, local bigotry prevents our obtaining large, centrally situated halls; but we hope that will be worn down in time. There were friends present from Barnsley, Chesterfield, and other places, and it is extremely probable that the start at Sheffield may lead to work being done in other and neighbouring localities.

To-day (Oct. 29) Mr. Cohen lectures, afternoon and evening, at the Tivoli Theatre, Barrow-in-Furness. The Tivoli, we understand, is one of the largest and finest theatres in Barrow, and good meetings are anticipated. The intention of the local Freethinkers is to form a local Branch of the N. S. S., and to pursue a regular propaganda. On Saturday evening Mr. Cohen has arranged for an informal talk with Barrow Freethinkers, in order to discuss the situation with them, and advise as to the course of their work.

Mr. Lloyd lectures to-day (Oct. 29) at Sheffield, and we hope to hear of still larger meetings. We know that his visit is being looked to with great interest, and we are quite sure that none who attend will be disappointed. It is a good opportunity for Freethinkers to introduce their Christian friends.

On Friday evening Mr. Lloyd will lecture at Gainsboro'. The meeting will be held in the Co-operative Hall, and will commence at eight o'clock.

Birmingham readers will kindly note that Mr. F. J. Gould lectures at the King's Hall, Corporation Street, to-day

(October 29), at 7 o'clock. We strongly advise all who can to make a point of attending, to bring friends with them. All will be well repaid for the time spent. Mr. Gould's subject is "The Christian Legend."

Our Business Manager tells us he would be pleased if those whose subscriptions to the *Freethinker* are due, or overdue, would remit as early as possible. As the information is not of much use to us, personally, we hereby give it as much publicity as is possible.

Our Sustentation Fund.

BEYOND stating the purpose of this Fund, considerations of space prevent our saying or publishing anything concerning it this week. The purpose of the Fund is to make good the deficit caused during the past year, a deficit entirely due to the increased cost of materials. A full statement of the year's working, showing the actual advance made, in spite of the War, was given in our issue of October 1, and to that we refer all inquirers.

We have received a letter containing an important suggestion with reference to the Sustentation Fund, which we will publish next week. The following is the list of subscriptions to date.

FOURTH LIST OF SUBSCRIPTIONS.

Previously acknowledged, £150 2s. 8d.—G. F. Shoults, £1 1s.; J. Kelsey, 2s.; Collette Jones, £1 1s.; J. Sumner, £5 5s.; J. Roseberry, 2s.; S. S. Leech, £1 1s.; S. Lidgetts, 2s. 6d.; J. Ralston, 5s.; H. C. S. (bi-weekly contribution), 1s.; Mrs. E. Adams, £3 3s.; F. Smith, 2s. 6d.; Harry and Janet, 10s.; H. T. C., £2; G. Proctor, 10s.; J. Partridge, 10s.; W. E. Hickman, 2s. 6d.; Nemo, 5s.; G. Smith, 9s. 6d.; W. Milroy, 10s.; Reg. Clayton, 5s.; J. and M. McGlashan, £2; J. Burrell, 1s.; W. J. Cinderey, 2s.; W. S. Charley, 10s. 6d.; Misleid, £1. *Per Miss Vance*.—Kingsland Branch. N. S. S., £1 7s. 6d.

[The last acknowledgment but one on the above list is "Misleid, £1." The note for £1 was left on our desk, but by some chance the accompanying letter was destroyed. We have, therefore, acknowledged it as above.]

A Human Creator of Plant Life.

ONE of the most gifted personalities of our period is the world-renowned American plant-breeder, Luther Burbank. An earnest Freethinker, in the higher philosophical sense, Burbank, like his favourite author, Emerson, cherishes a firm faith in the existence of some unspeakable power which permeates Nature and unceasingly guides her along progressive paths. To him the phenomena manifested by suns and planets, and all therein displayed, are the outward and visible signs of the evolving energies of an infinite and eternal universe. Perhaps Pantheism, rather than Deism, better represents his attitude towards the unseen.

Burbank's intimate acquaintance with floral Nature in all her varying moods has convinced him that evolution is no longer a theory, but a demonstrated truth. This remarkable man has conducted hundreds of thousands of experiments with over 2,500 distinct species of plants. And he has observed the evolution of innumerable forms of vegetable life, most of which were previously unknown. With no special educational advantages as a lad, he has enriched his mind by independent reading, and through his constant converse with the floral world.

Of blended English and Scottish descent, the child was father to the man. As a baby boy he was intensely

fond of flowers, and, unlike most children, he treasured the blossoms until they withered away. As the baby grew older, the child preferred plants to animals as pets. When his working-days came, the boy toiled in a factory for a miserable pittance, and, discovering it difficult to make both ends meet, he turned his attention to invention, and constructed a labour-saving machine. He was rewarded by his employers with a rise of wages, and knowing friends forecasted his future fame as an inventor. But Burbank's genius was of another order. He was anxious to make two, or even a dozen, blades of grass grow where one grew before, and he became a market gardener. Out of these early efforts arose the celebrated Burbank potato, which he sold outright for 150 dollars. Illness overtook him, and for a time his career as a nurseryman was closed. He wandered from his New England home to California, but his misfortunes were such that he was reduced to the meanest and worst-paid forms of work. Indeed, he nearly succumbed to an attack of fever brought on by his abject circumstances. But the poor sometimes help the poor. Mr. W. S. Harwood, in his authoritative volume on the life and labours of Burbank, *New Creations in Plant Life*, informs us that:—

A woman in the neighbourhood, herself in straightened circumstances, found him one day in such a critical condition that she insisted on sharing with him the small portion of milk which she could afford to spare from the one cow that supplied her family. He protested against taking it because he might never be able to repay her, and, indeed, there was scant hope in his condition that he would live to do it. The woman insisted, and the pint of milk a day which she brought him saved his life.

He was but a shadow when he was able to rise from his sick-bed and go in search of work. But his affairs slowly mended; he grew stronger, and at last his savings were sufficient to enable him to secure the little plot of land on which was erected the nursery subsequently so celebrated throughout the world.

By means of artificial selection and cross-breeding, he evolved most marvellous fruits and flowers. These new creations he sold, usually for absurdly small sums. Others derived wealth from Burbank's labours. Curiously, backward Europe appreciated his productions before their value and importance were understood in the States. Burbank's income increased, but his researches were prosecuted on an ever-expanding scale, and he was driven to encroach on the savings he had set aside for less prosperous times.

When expenditure began to outrun income, his more candid friends reminded him that, had he followed their advice, his present embarrassments would have been avoided. Others, who had heard rumours of his fantastic productions, began to sneer at him as a mere monstrosity-maker who distorted the fair face of Nature. Nor were the clergy silent.—

A minister invited Mr. Burbank to listen to a sermon on his work, and when the guest was in the pew denounced him in bitter fashion as a man who was working in direct opposition to the will of God, in thus creating new forms of life which never should have been created, or if created, only by God himself.

False friends sought to rob him of his secrets. Some sour ones among them came to visit Burbank's grounds, in order to scoff at his creations. And, although few of these people remained to pray, many of them, amazed at the great plant-breeder's productions, departed wiser and, let us hope, better men.

Arboriculture is certain to exert a commanding influence in the coming years. The many and varied uses to which timber and the other products and by-products of forest trees are already put are likely to be consider-

ably extended. In afforestation, one of the most serious disadvantages is the slow growth of the trees. The oak grows for some hundreds of years, and is said to live for a thousand. In comparison with this, the duration of the individual human life is quite insignificant. Now, in forestry some of Burbank's most notable triumphs have been accomplished. This pioneer was ever contemptuous towards the term "impossible," as was Mirabeau when he dismissed it as "that blockhead of a word."

Burbank was constantly informed that he aimed at the achievement of the impossible, and that certain failure was forthcoming. Yet there is now growing a magnificent line of trees in front of Burbank's dwelling at Santa Rosa, California, and, in the language of one who has often admired them:—

They are noble trees, tall, wide-spreading, stately to look upon, dignified and substantial as trees go, not weak or irresolute, possessing that indefinable attribute which, even in trees, we call character.

They are of very considerable economic value, and when the above description was penned they were only twelve years old.

After long and careful preparation, Burbank united an English walnut with a common Californian walnut tree by cross-fertilization. From the seedlings of this hybrid he selected the best only for propagation, and he continued to plant only the best of each succeeding generation until he had evolved by artificial selection a group of seedlings with sufficient stamina to stand alone. Six of these were set in rough soil, where they received no attention of any kind, even in times of serious drought. Fourteen years later, in 1905, these neglected plants had developed into trees nearly eighty feet high, with a branch spread of seventy-five feet, and with trunks nearly two feet in diameter at a height of a dozen or fifteen feet from the ground. The wood is of exceptionally fine quality for several important purposes, and, as we have seen, the timber is of remarkably rapid growth.

Standing in the near neighbourhood of these trees is a second row of walnuts. They are over thirty years old, more than twice the age of the others, but their height is merely twenty feet, with boles and branches of proportionate growth. These are dwarfs in comparison with the giants of Burbank's creation, despite their greater age. And not only are the Burbank walnuts of largely increased monetary value, but they are far more beautiful than either of their ancestors.

This splendid tree is known as the Paradox, and is admirably adapted to areas such as California, where the winters are genial. Burbank was anxious to obtain a tree possessing all the fast-growing qualities of the Paradox, combined with its excellent timber and fuel values, which would flourish in regions where the winters are severe. A second hybrid was secured by blending the indigenous Californian black walnut with the belated New England black walnut. This is the "Royal." With this all Burbank's desires were obtained. The trees proved supremely beautiful, and developed so rapidly that they soon became a conspicuous feature of the Californian landscape, dwarfed the surrounding vegetation, and even eclipsed the magnificent native oaks. Fine nuts are also borne by these walnut trees; but in the evolution of nuts a more signal success was achieved with the chestnut. The chestnut usually bears at from ten to twenty-five years, if produced from seed. Burbank regarded this as "altogether too slow for modern days, so he has made the chestnut bear nuts at the age of a year and a half; indeed, nuts have come upon trees not over seven months old."

T. F. PALMER.

(To be continued.)

Talks With Young Listeners.

XVII.—The Exile.

"FIRE, fire!—doom!—wrath!—woe!—curse!—ruin!—judgment!"

These groans and lamentations came from a gaunt man, hollow-eyed, grim, and sad in the mouth, as he slowly passed through the streets of Jerusalem. His voice shook people's nerves, but, as he was a man of Yahweh, he was allowed to sigh and moan, and even to enter the king's house to deliver his unhappy message.

This was the prophet Jeremiah. Even to this very day a complaining tale is often called a "jeremiad."

What he meant was that the warriors of Babylon would crush the Jews and their city, and it would all happen because the people had forgotten Yahweh.

Some of the courtiers got so sick of his groans that they seized the prophet and lowered him by ropes into a well, where there was no water, but there was mud, and he sank in the mire.

An African slave, who held an office in the royal household, touched the king's heart by the story of the prophet's misery. The king, who was a weathercock sort of person, blown this and that way by his feelings, at once ordered that Jeremiah should be released. Ropes were let down into the well, padded with rags for the prisoner to put under his arm-pits, and a number of men hauled up the prophet, the good African's black face beaming with pleasure.

As you know, thousands of Hebrews were carried into exile from Babylon. Our doleful prophet was among the captives, but the Babylonians perhaps thought he had helped their conquest of Jerusalem by his upsetting the citizens' nerves, so they let him go free. He wandered off with a band of Jews into Egypt. Nothing ever made him cheerful. The last we hear of him is still the same cry of misery—woe to Zion, woe to Moab, woe to Philistines, woe to Babylon, woe to Egypt, woe to everybody! There is a book in the Bible full of his sobs. It is called "Lamentations."

During the seventy years of exile, the Hebrews were permitted to live a peaceable life, and we may suppose they tilled fields, tended sheep and cattle, and traded in goods. The children were told of the Home-land whence they were torn. Fathers and mothers would gather in quiet chambers, or in remote spots in the fields, to listen to the preaching of elders, or to stories of Israel and Judah, and the ancient times of Moses and Abraham. Now and then some would creep down to the side of canal, or river, where willow-trees grew, and "by the waters of Babylon" they sat and wept, as they remembered Zion. And so days passed, months passed, years passed; twenty years, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty—and the moment of liberty drew nigh.

On the plain of Babylon one of the exiles—a priest—would sit thinking and waiting; and his dreams and thoughts can be found in the Book of Ezekiel. Once he wanders along the Grand Canal, and sees coming from the hills of the north a blazing fire-chariot, drawn by four winged animals, with the faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle; and Yahweh sits in it, like a man of shining gold, surrounded by a rainbow, and tells the prophet about the past, present, and future. Ezekiel sees heaps of dry bones in a valley, and he shouts to them, and the skeletons stand up—a vast army of living men; and Yahweh says that the Hebrew tribes, who seemed like dry, dead bones, will come to life again, and be one people, instead of a divided people, and have one king. Then Ezekiel sees a vision of a New Jerusalem, a new Temple, and a new country. A crystal stream flows from the gate of this new city all the way

to the Dead Sea, and the waters of the Dead Sea are no longer bitter and salt; and in the stream and sea are many fish, and on the banks of the stream are many fruit-trees; and the twelve tribes dwell in peace in this lovely land, and even foreigners come and join the happy nation—that is, foreigners who worship Yahweh.

We may suppose that the Hebrews knew they were not likely to stay in Babylon for ever. I daresay the rulers of Babylon reckoned that in two generations (about seventy years) the captives would be so drilled and disciplined that they would never wish to rebel again; and then they could be allowed to return. Of course, the glorious things which Ezekiel expected did not happen. The ten tribes are still lost; and the Dead Sea is still salt and bitter. But one thing really did happen. The Jews who went back to Canaan had put aside all Baals, sacred horses, Asherah-pillars, star-gods, moon-gods, and so on, and were people of the One God, or Monotheists.

About seventy years after the burning of Solomon's Temple¹ some sort of a building, not very beautiful, was set up again by the Jews in Canaan, with the help of some who had returned; and old men, who remembered the former Temple, wept with a loud voice, while the younger folk raised a chorus of triumph and joy. More groups of exiles found their way along the hot Syrian roads from Babylon to Jerusalem, though we cannot believe the tale that forty-two thousand all came at once.²

The Persians were now masters of Babylon; and one day the Persian king noticed that his cup bearer, a Jew, looked very miserable.

"Why so sad, Nehemiah?" he asked in a kindly tone.

"O King," he replied, "live for ever! I am sad because my beloved city of Jerusalem—so I hear from travellers—is so long in ruins, its walls broken, and its gates blackened by fire."

"Tell me, Nehemiah, what you want to do."

"Sir, I pray you let me have leave to go and rebuild the city of my fathers."

The king graciously consented, and the cup-bearer made haste to Jerusalem, carrying with him passports and letters from the Persian court.

One moonlight night he made the round of the city. The Temple, such as it was, stood secure; but the ramparts were crumbled, the gates off their hinges, and the streets strewn with litter. It was a heart-breaking scene for a patriot.

The cup-bearer called a meeting of his fellow-citizens, and put fire and spirit into them by his rousing speeches. Ere long, bands of workers were busy raising new walls and turrets, fixing gates, and clearing rubbish.

Groups of Samaritans collected on the hills near the city and watched the work with envious and unneighbourly eyes, and sinister-looking Arabs and other desert-men hung about, as if ready to stop the building of the city. Nehemiah and his helpers laboured with picks and shovels and trowels, but always had swords and spears lying at hand in case of attack. Every day the cup-bearer fed hundreds of the builders at his tables, and roasted an ox and six choice sheep for each meal; also fowls; and sometimes wine was provided. And so the wall was finished.

Some years later the open space in front of the Water Gate was crowded with men, women, and children, who listened, hour after hour, to a man reading from a high

¹ A story in 1 Esdras iv. 45 says that the Edomites burned the Temple when the Babylonians took Jerusalem. The whole history of the Exile and Return is very confused and unreliable.

² As said in Ezra ii. 63; and 1 Esdras v. 2 affirms that the exiles, guarded by a thousand Persian horsemen, marched to the sound of fifes and drums!

wooden pulpit. He held a Hebrew roll in his hand, and, in a loud voice, he recited Yahweh's laws and maxims; and the folk shouted "Amen, Amen"! Next day they kept a holiday, building booths of olive-branches and boughs of myrtle, pine, and palm; and some booths were in the streets, and some on the flat roofs of houses; and a buzz of merriment and song could be heard all over the city.

At such times as these we may picture a poet or a minstrel going in and out among the gaily dressed throngs and singing psalms, such as we find in the Book of Isaiah.¹ Here is one such psalm, joyfully chanting the return of exiles from the dreary land of willows, canals, and Babylonians:—

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing.

The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.

No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast.

The ransomed of Yahweh shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

And the people would answer "Hallelujah!" "Praise Yahweh!"

* * * * *

The man in the pulpit may have read the law from the roll in the year 445 B.C., and in the year 63 B.C. the Romans made Judæa part of their empire. Between these two dates a great many things happened. Alexander the Great passed through the land with his Greek soldiers, their bronze armour flashing in the sun. More and more the Hebrews met the Greeks, and mixed with them, and traded with them, and learned their language. The Jews were beginning to spread, in groups and settlements, into various parts of the world—in Egypt, in Arabia, in Damascus, in Asia Minor, in Greece, in Rome; and this spreading, or "dispersion," has gone on till our own day.

At one time many Jews had become almost like Greeks, and gave up old customs, such as keeping the Saturday-Sabbath holy, or the cutting of men and boys known as circumcision. A Greek king, who held rule over Judæa in 168 B.C., put up the statuette of the bearded God Zeus, King of Heaven, on the altar in the Temple at Jerusalem. The sight of this Greek image, with the eagle at its side, horrified the Jews, and a great revolt broke out, led by the hero Judas Maccabeus. Judas, fighting like a lion, fell in battle. The German-English musician, Handel, has composed a splendid oratorio, or musical poem with choruses, on the subject of Judas's courage and glory.

F. J. GOULD.

The Effect of War on Character.

I WOULD suggest that an application be made to the War Office for permission to Mr. Lloyd to proceed to France as a Secular Chaplain. If some of the expressions we hear from religious people at home reflects what is being preached to the Tommies at the Front, we cannot be in any doubt as to the false and pernicious ideas that are fostered by the Churches in relation to the effect of war on human character. War is exalted and

¹ This book is the work of a group of authors, who composed their hymns and poems at different times during the 500 years from 700 B.C. to 200 B.C.

Peace is depreciated. That washbuckling Free Churchman, Dr. P. T. Forsyth, has written a book on the "Christian Ethics of War," in which he advances the original thesis that Christian precepts have no direct bearing on the relations between State and State! Why, then, should any community style itself or be styled a Christian country? The repudiation of the plain and simple teaching of Jesus, first of all communicated to plain, uneducated fishermen—how far removed psychologically from the "disciples" of to-day!—lands the "latter-day saints" in positions of most ridiculous absurdity. Now, a Special Committee of Wesleyans, "appointed for dealing with the spiritual condition of Methodism involved in such questions as the continual decline of membership and the decrease of Sunday scholars," has placed on record its view "that the War has called forth some of the finest qualities from its members," who, it is declared, have attained a wonderful "nobility of soul." What is the plain suggestion? Surely that we require the periodical infliction of the horrors of war to produce "fine qualities" and "nobility of soul." This is absolutely untrue. War in itself, and on the face of it, is a damnable thing; and even when we are compelled to a war in defence of Liberty, and to prosecute it with energy, we should be none the less unsparing in our condemnation of those who are responsible for the origin of wars.

For we strenuously maintain that "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war." We do not say that a war may not be waged for an ideal, for the destruction of Tyranny and Falsehood and the establishment of Peace. But the main instigators of dynastic and ambitious wars have for the most part been ecclesiastical intriguers, and, as we see to-day, the leaders of the Churches are the most persistent war "profiteers." As rival "drummers," they show a most restless activity. As in war, so in peace, they are more intent on making proselytes than on feeding a hungry child. War is not at all necessary to heroism. Men do not retain the fineness of their qualities because of war, but in spite of it. There may in war be numerous opportunities for an exhibition of the latent heroism of men; but that heroism in peacetime has repeatedly been displayed in shipwrecks, earthquakes, mining disasters, railway accidents, and great fires, cannot be doubted. To the debit side of the account of war must be placed the vile lusts it has developed, and the cruelty of sordid selfishness and swollen pride.

Well, now what have two thousand years of Christianity done to mitigate that brutality in nature? We have the answer in the present War. And this new brutality of the twentieth century fostered by Christian "teachers," propagated with the coolest and most calculating cynicism by the leaders of the most Christian nation in the world, and utilized with the subtlest ingenuity, adds all the more to the condemnation of Christianity. The priests have been so intent on spiritualizing that they have failed to humanize.

Scarcely a day passes upon which we do not have some parson shrieking against some new found social "sin" to be set against the Wesleyan discovery. Of course, the death of the Devil means the extinction of the black-coated profession. But keeping him alive involves a most neurotic kind of pessimism. Do human beings merit the slanders hurled at them? We do not believe it. The Bishop of London got black in the face the other day against "lecherous" and "slimy" playwrights and "ghouls" who trap young soldiers into immoral courses. Is the young British soldier such a gull? These general assertions without exact proofs are always suspect—and rightly so. But that is the Bishop's story, and, on the assumption of its accuracy,

we have every reason again to deplore the effect of Christianity upon character. Sir George Alexander has accorded a somewhat platitudinous interview to a *Sunday Chronicle* representative on the subject of "lecherous and slimy plays," and he concurs with "my friend the Bishop" in denunciation of such things; but the comfort he affords his friend the Bishop is somewhat frigid; for after stating his concurrence he very promptly disclaims knowledge of any theatres that produce such plays.

The best type of human character is that which can withstand the dehumanizing influences of war. And yet all wars have been "holy"—in somebody's estimation—even when they were punitive expeditions, as the Christian Kaiser intended the present War in part to be.

IGNOTUS.

Correspondence.

THE CONVERTED ATHEIST.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I was particularly interested in your account of the above appearing in the *Freethinker* a few weeks ago.

It appealed to me the more because of a little incident which occurred about eighteen month's ago in connection with the same correspondence between myself and a Christian advocate, which it may interest your readers to see recorded.

I may say I am one of those who believe it is far better to fully inquire into these stories about one-time Atheists again making tracks for the kingdom of heaven; and so, when my argumentative friend, as a sort of final thrust, told me that a Mr. Berrisford, of Sheffield, a leader of Freethinkers, had returned to the sheepfold, I felt inquisitive, and determined to make inquiries.

A Wesleyan magazine, the *Joyful News*, contained an account of the "joyful news" of the return of this lost sheep. Obtaining Mr. Berrisford's address, I wrote and asked him if it was quite correct that he had surrendered a reasonable philosophy of life for the superstitions of Christianity, and also said I would take it as a great favour if he would answer me one or two questions which I enclosed. Although I enclosed a stamped envelope, it was a matter of, I believe, three weeks before the reply came. It was very short and totally evasive.

He begged to say it was quite true he had returned to the Christian fold; that what appeared in the *Joyful News* was quite correct; that he was a very busy man and could not find time to reply to my questions; that no good purpose would be served by so doing; and hoped I would not further pursue the subject. Which all goes to show that "least said, soonest mended."

My Freethought comrades will now be able to form their own conclusions about gentlemen who prefer the atmosphere of the sheepfold to that attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason in all matters relating to life and conduct.

JOHN BRELSE.

Sparks.

When the celestial committee was discussing the question of the Incarnation, Jahweh was strongly opposed to the proposal. When asked the reason for his opposition, he could only reply, "Don't leave me alone with the Ghost!"

An English officer, in the middle of a fierce attack, received the following question from headquarters, "How many men shall you be bringing to Communion next Sunday?" His reply is not recorded.

An Oriental scholar was engaged in translating literally the Pentateuch from the original Hebrew into the Danish language. As he was a bad writer, he sent his manuscripts to an office in Copenhagen to be typed. After a few days had passed, the manuscripts were returned to him with a letter regretting that the firm could not undertake the job of typing the work in question for fear of injuring the character of their (female) assistants.

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.

INDOOR.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, Victoria Road, off Kentish Town Road, N.W.): 7.30, Debate, "A Scientific Business Man's Alternative to Socialism." T. F. Palmer and Mr. Ryde.

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park): 3, H. V. Storey, a Lecture.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3, a Lecture
FINSBURY PARK N. S. S.: 11.15, a Lecture.

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

HYDE PARK: 11.30, Messrs. Saphin and Shaller; 3.15, Messrs. Kells and Dales, "Humour and Fact"; 6.30, Messrs. Saphin, Shaller, and Hyatt.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

ABERTILLERY (Tillery Institute): H. F. Northcote, 3, "Comparative Religion"; 6, "How the Mountains, Rivers, and Valleys Came."

BARROW-IN-FURNESS (Tivoli Theatre, Forshaw Street): Chapman Cohen, 3, "A World Without God"; 8, "The Challenge of Unbelief."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (King's Hall, Corporation Street): 7, F. J. Gould, "The Christian Legend."

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